University of Alberta

A Narrative Inquiry of Canadian Aboriginal Women's Dress and Identity: Change and Continuity

by

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Abstract

A narrative inquiry approach explores two Aboriginal women's dress adaptations in bicultural environments. In the study, the topic of dress becomes the medium for storytelling which stimulates Aboriginal women's descriptions of their life and experiences as they adjust to the influences of changes in both the Canadian mainstream and the Aboriginal cultures. Autobiographical researcher narratives also depict bicultural experiences and the influence of intermarriage on dress and identity. Thoughts and memories in storied form place articles of clothing and personal belongings in situational contexts that yield more than descriptions of artifacts and material goods. Values and beliefs inherited from cultural interactions, family relationships and childhood experiences resound throughout the participants' descriptions of their dress and changing environments. By focusing on the topic of dress and bicultural experiences in the participants' lives, themes of cultural change and plotlines of continuity became evident.

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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Overview

This study examined storytelling about Aboriginal women's dress as a way to describe cultural change and its impact on cultural identity. The result is a collection of narratives which not only illuminate themes of bicultural identity for the researcher but also provide insight into the impact of cultural change from two Aboriginal women's perspectives. The research purpose was to gain understanding of two women's bicultural experiences in both Aboriginal and mainstream environments.

The narrative inquiry process of data collection provided the researcher and participants in the study with the opportunity to tell their own stories. The storytelling component emphasizes the notion that personal stories about lived experiences add depth and dimension to academic research. Within a cooperative shared search for meaning the research story evolved. A collection of archival images and plates compliment theoretical discussions and personal narratives. Autobiographical reflections of the researcher are positioned throughout the study in order to situate the researcher as one of the central characters in the research experience.

In the first chapter, images and discussion of Aboriginal women's historical and contemporary dress explore correlations between Aboriginal clothing adaptations and cultural change. A literature review in the second chapter examines theories of dress as a form of non-verbal communication, theories of identity and cultural change and how these relate to Aboriginal women in Canada. Chapter three summarizes two earlier studies which explored the occurrence of Aboriginal dress adaptations.

Chapter four establishes the cultural relevance of the narrative inquiry methodology for Aboriginal research and reviews issues concerning research with Aboriginal people. Important ethical components of the research project including the recognition of Aboriginal concerns regarding research in their communities are also summarized. In addition, chapter five describes narrative inquiry methods, presents the research puzzle and the study's goals.

In chapter six, research preparations which included consultations with an Aboriginal Elder and gaining consent from two Aboriginal women are discussed. Issues related to the need for sensitivity to traditional protocols are also discussed. An underlying theme of ribbons is reflected in researcher autobiographical narratives. Reference is made to ribbonwork as a metaphor for the research process.

Chapter seven presents interviews with consenting participants and recalls their stories about styles of dress in their past and present lives. Themes of culture, identity and cultural change are presented in a series of co-edited narratives. Chapter eight includes the researcher's and the participant's narrative responses to the written version of their stories. The study ends with discussions about plotlines, themes, unplanned dynamics and the research objectives.

Definitions of Terms

For the purposes of this study, the following definitions have been adopted:

Aboriginal: "...describes a person or living thing that has existed in a country or continent since the earliest time known to people" (Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary, 2003).

Acculturation: The acquiring of knowledge and behaviors as a result of continuous contact between two or more distinct societies which causes the beliefs and customs of the groups to merge.

Apparel: Includes "personal attire; clothing; clothes; garments; fashions; things one wears to cover the naked body" (The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language Fourth Edition, 2000).

Appearance: "It is more than dress because it takes into account body features, movements, and positions, as well as the visible body modifications and supplements of dress" (Barnes and Eicher, 1992, p. 20).

Attire: "clothes, especially of a particular or formal type" (Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary, 2003).

Bicultural: living and functioning in two cultural environments.

Clothing: "The word clothing is most frequently used to emphasize enclosures that cover the body and generally omits body modifications" (Roach-Higgins, 1992, p.7).

Culture: Culture is a way of life. "It may be the way of life of different nations or time, or it may be the way of life of different groups existing within a nation or a time. ...The plurality of this conception means that each culture has activities and standards that are specific to it, and the standards of one cannot be used to judge the activities of another" (Barnard, 1996, p.58).

Dress: "...is a comprehensive term used to identify both direct body changes and items added to the body..." (Roach-Higgins & Eicher, 1992, p.1).

Fashion: The prevailing style or custom, as in dress or behavior. Fashion is a broad term that "refers to many different kinds of material and non material cultural products (e.g. houses, music, automobiles, scientific theories, philosophy, recreation)" (Roach-Higgins, 1992, p.7).

First Nation: "An Aboriginal group or community, especially any of the bands officially recognized by the Canadian government" (The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language Fourth Edition, 2000).

Identity: Identity refers to the way people see themselves, the groups they feel a part of and the significant aspects of themselves that they use to describe themselves to others. "A description of who one is, and how one fits into his social groups and society over all". (The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language: Fourth Edition. 2000). "...who a person is, or the qualities of a person or group which make them different from others" (Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary, 2003).

Indigenous: This term refers to people originating and living or occurring naturally in an area or environment and often indicates an international category.

Mainstream: "the prevailing current of thought" (Merriam-Webster Medical Dictionary, 2002) "the way of life or set of beliefs accepted by

most people" (Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary, 2003). "...typical of white middle-class America" (The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language: Fourth Edition. 2000).

Native: "...relating to the first people to live in an area" (Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary, 2003).

Retraditionalization: A term describing cultural revisiting of ancient ways and reinterpretations of traditions. (Newhouse, 2000, p. 403)

Oral traditions: Oral traditions are narratives transmitted by word of mouth over at least a generation. (Dr. Alexander von Gernet, 1996, p. 1)

Traditional: "The term 'tradition' in ethnographic research has come to mean an item or action inherited from the past" (Taylor, 2002, p.201).

Aboriginal Women's Dress and Cultural Change

During the fur trade era, Canadian Aboriginal women reinterpreted dress designs and incorporated numerous trade items such as ribbons, woven cloth and beads as well as new technologies such as the use of sewing machines. By the late 1890s, Aboriginal dress styles reminiscent of life before European contact almost vanished. In her book, "Flint & Feather: The Life and Times of E. Pauline Johnson, Tekahionwake", Gray describes the disappearance of distinctive Aboriginal dress in her description of Pauline Johnson's search for a stage attire that would visually represent her Aboriginal identity. Gray explains that Johnson desired a dress that would compliment her Mohawk ancestry and her stage image as a poetess. Gray notes that, "[Pauline] was conscious that when reciting her Indian poems, she presented two incompatible images" (Gray, 1948, p. 155). In her search, Johnson found that in the late 1800's, on her Six Nations Reserve, "only a handful of female elders still clung to traditional outfits which consisted of tunics, leggings and blankets". These clothing items did not reflect her "Indian maiden" image portrayed in media reports or the images presented in popular Wild West Shows. After an unsuccessful search for attire compatible with her poetry, popular stereotypes and her mixed ancestry, Johnson remodeled a

costume she purchased from the Hudson's Bay Company. Quick changes during intermission from what Gray describes as an "entirely synthetic creation" of European dress emphasized Pauline's dilemma reconciling cultural borders. Gray states,

> Pauline would hurriedly strip off the buckskin and moccasins, tighten the laces on her corset, slip on an elegant evening gown, silk stockings and pumps (and often a picture hat), then step back onto the stage and woo her listeners with verse about birdsong, landscapes, mountains and trains (Gray, 1948, p. 160).

Johnson's poetry alludes to a vanishing culture where "two mighty races strived to understand each other" (Gray, 1948, p.147). Plates 1 and 2 illustrate how dress communicated Johnson's attempt to balance her mixed heritage with the influence of Euro-Canadian styles. The illustration on the front cover of Gray's book (Plate 1) shows Pauline Johnson facing one direction in a Victorian gown and facing the opposite direction dressed in feathers, fur, buckskin, beaded moccasins and bear claws. Pauline's opposing stances illustrate the opposing cultural environments faced by Aboriginal women during the late 1800s and early 1900s when dramatic political and social changes were taking place.

Plate 1. The cover of Charlotte Gray's Book showing Pauline Johnson's bicultural dress.

Plate 2. Two portraits of Pauline Johnson's culture-specific attire.
Source: McMaster University. E.Pauline Johnson Project
www.humanities.mcmaster.ca/~pjohnson/home.html

Pauline Johnson's difficulty locating culturally relevant attire illustrates how European expectations meant that Aboriginal woman's traditional dress was reserved for stage performances and country fairs. Canadian government policies such as the Gradual Civilization Act of 1857 and the Gradual Enfranchisement Act of 1869 suppressed cultural activities. Aboriginal women transitioned from traditional roles commanding high respect to having no voting rights in their bands. The

Gradual Enfranchisement Act also stated that a woman married to a non-status man would lose her band membership and Indian status. Cultural change induced by political policy pressured Aboriginal women to participate in European society which included adapting their dress accordingly.

Contemporary Aboriginal Fashions

In current Canadian society, Aboriginal cultural pride and cohesiveness are creating a revival in traditionally-inspired clothing. Stimulated by First Nation self-governance as well as by the development of Aboriginal institutions and the growth of government programs aimed at improving public awareness about Aboriginal issues and culture, Aboriginal women's participation and visibility in the Canadian mainstream society has dramatically increased. As the result of new careers that rely upon culture-specific knowledge, Aboriginal women often live bicultural lifestyles wherein they function simultaneously in two cultures. Some Aboriginal women attain post-secondary education, establish challenging careers and live lifestyles that immerse them in the mainstream Canadian culture. Aboriginal women who are valued for their traditional backgrounds are employed in positions where the preservation of traditional values, beliefs, ceremonies, cultural dress and languages is encouraged.

Images from native fashion websites and magazines dress designs that reinterpret Aboriginal traditional dress. The image in the top left corner of Plate 3 is from the cover of "Whispering Wind" magazine. This American magazine publishes articles, old photographs and provides detailed garment construction instructions to those interested in "the material culture of the American Indian: Past & Present". The magazine states its mission as "to bring the tradition home and help keep the tradition alive" (Feb 2004, www.whisperingwind.com/backissu.htm). The

images in the bottom left and the far right depict contemporary designs inspired by Aboriginal historical dress (Feb 2004, www.nativeonline/fashion.htm). The image in the bottom right is a poster taken from a website promoting contemporary Aboriginal women's sportswear (February 2004, www.nativethreads.com). Taken together the images show multidirectional cultural expressions incorporated in modern fashions such as t-shirts, revealing mid-drifts and machine embroidery while at the same time maintaining signs of cultural affiliation such as fringes, feathers and beadwork.

Plate 3. Illustration of Contemporary Aboriginal Fashions in 2004
Sources: www.nativeonline/fashion.htm & www.nativethreads.com

Researcher Narrative: Crossing Cultural Borders

In this study, I have situated myself as a researcher, as a storyteller and as a person who has lived the experience of cultural change. A narrative exploration of my immersion in a world very different from the Euro-Canadian culture of my birth reveals how my clothing and identity has also responded to cultural change. In the following narrative, I revisit aspects of my life in two distinct cultures: the culture of my European ancestry and the culture of my husband's Aboriginal ancestry.

My passion for texture, color and fashion winds through my life and, in retrospect, often mirrors periods of transition and identity instability. In the following story, I recall memories associated with a photograph from the 1970's. By reflecting on the photograph, I recognized many symbolic messages that expressed themselves through the medium of my dress.

At the age of twenty-two, I married an Aboriginal man who, as a young boy, became estranged from his family and cultural traditions. He and some of his siblings spent the majority of their childhoods living with non-native people in prairie foster homes and in Northern residential schools. When we met, my husband owned what I considered to be a very limited dull wardrobe of plain t-shirts, collared cotton shirts and blue jeans. Early in our relationship, he explained to me that he preferred clothing that was low profile because he did not like to attract attention to himself. He favored denim and dark colors that allowed him to blend into the background at social gatherings. Alternatively, I loved to attract attention to myself and wore brightly patched jeans or long flowing border print skirts combined with trendy blouses or t-shirts adorned with bright sequin appliqués. I was a young creative seamstress who enthusiastically and painstakingly sewed clothing which I coordinated with my collection of hats, brightly decorated jackets, long colorful scarves, unusual belts,

big jewelry and high heels. In my youthful exuberance, every social gathering was an opportunity to proudly display a new outfit complete with carefully coordinated accessories. In hindsight, I recognize how our opposing dress styles expressed differing views about how we each fit into the surrounding society. My husband dressed to remain anonymous in an environment that was sometimes hostile towards his cultural background. I felt safe dressing in clothing that reflected the anti-establishment hippie movement of the time.

I took acceptance in my family of origin for granted but the announcement of our intention to marry challenged my sense of belonging to that same group. My grandparents worried about how a mixed marriage could exist in our family. My grandmother told me my children would never forgive me for imposing on them the conflicts that would result coming from a mixed ancestral background. At my grandmother's request, my uncle investigated my boyfriend's background searching for information about his character. All he found out was that my boyfriend was a hard worker. My father, angered by the seriousness of our involvement, said he wanted nothing more to do with me. He was convinced I had chosen a life of poverty, violence and alcohol abuse where the women were beaten and children neglected.

Shocked and worried about my future, close friends recounted stories of other couples who had entered into interracial relationships. They warned me that these people often faced banishment and social exclusion from their peers and families. My choice of an Aboriginal partner challenged all the rules but I believed I was strong enough to overcome the negative attitudes and criticism. I blindly closed my mind and heart to all the warnings. As I prepared myself to enter into a mixed marriage, I told myself, "I could take it", whatever "it" was.

The photograph in Plate 4 shows my new husband and I at a family gathering celebrating my grandparent's 50th wedding anniversary. In this photograph, I dressed in colors and styles similar to my relatives.

Plate 4. Family gathering in 1974.

In my mint green pants and a coordinating top embroidered with pink roses I blended in well with other family members who also wore pastel greens, pinks and whites. My husband's attire differed from the clothing of the other men. His crossed arms, bare skin, head turned away from the camera and the physical space between him and the family unit visually illustrates his discomfort in the unfamiliar setting. I felt close to my family and physically stood in closer proximity to my relations than he did.

After our marriage, I denied the inevitable alienation from my family I had been warned about. Over time, I noticed my husband and I were unwelcome in some social situations. Eventually old friendships weakened and family visits were fewer. As my feelings of rejection grew,

my dress became less vibrant and colorful. Gradually sometimes unwillingly, I immersed myself deeper into the Aboriginal culture looking for acceptance. As a result, like my husband, I chose unobtrusive clothing that blended quietly. We lived on the fringes of both societies. Shifts in my wardrobe marked many transitions as my husband and I negotiated differing culture-based values and beliefs in our life together.

At first, my husband and I changed our appearances back and forth between his ideas of proper attire and my concepts of what it meant to be fashionable. He wanted me to dress less flamboyantly and I wanted him to conform to acceptable stereotypes of the successful male with short well-groomed hair, shined shoes and a leather jacket. He became silent and upset if I wore bright colors and I manipulated his wardrobe by hiding or discarding the clothes I disliked. Symbolically, our dress conflicts responded to internal and external pressures which subtly pushed and pulled each of us to adhere to the other's beliefs and values. Occasionally my husband described a pull towards his Aboriginal family and background. At the same time, I longed to belong in the mainstream Euro-Canadian society. Externally, we faced racial discrimination and stereotyping. I was shattered by the extent of discrimination that we encountered in the mainstream society where before I had taken social acceptance for granted.

In my teens, I had explored my identity by daring to dress outrageously, undaunted by glares from older generations. I dressed for acknowledgement from my peers who were the artistic, rebellious and expressive people of the '70s. I never felt rejected or outside the mainstream. However, after my marriage, my world was traumatically transformed and my naïve belief in free self-expression gradually dissolved as I embarked on a journey where ethnic borders and racial stereotypes flourished. I often received conflicting messages stemming from labels of what it meant to be 'Indian' or 'White' no matter which culture I visited.

Years of racial incidents such as the refusal of service in restaurants or the denial of decent rental accommodation and unfounded harassment by police led to my realization that racial discrimination existed everywhere. I found that systematic discrimination contributed to fewer employment opportunities, inadequate housing and poorer quality healthcare. It was mentally and emotionally arduous for me to believe that so many people - my people - even those in highly respected professions, could openly support such harmful stereotypes. It was beyond my comprehension that politicians, doctors and other educated people could and would exercise their power to classify and reject those whom they considered outsiders.

Yet, in the midst of racial prejudice, I remained determined to live a prosperous life regardless of the opinions of others. I refused to accept that my children could not expect the same treatment as other children when they attended school or went to the bank or ate in restaurants. My interpretation of social rules shifted more than once, back and forth between the expectations of the society of my upbringing and the reality of my surroundings. As I adjusted to the rude comments from neighbors and family members, I found myself forced to live not only a marginal existence, on the fringes of the Euro-Canadian society but also on the fringe of my husband's Aboriginal culture.

Sometimes, I presented my pale skin color, blonde hair and blue eyes without mentioning my husband's ancestry in order to secure adequate housing, negotiate bank loans and gain employment. One day, while working in a sales position, where I dressed in expensive suits, wore the most current hairstyles and greeted my customers in fashionable high heels, my manager quietly instructed me to ensure that my husband not come into the store. He explained my husband's Aboriginal features would scare the customers away and hurt company sales figures. That

night, I cautiously carried the message home. My husband quietly obliged and from that day on, he waited for me at a library near my place of employment where he patiently read sports magazines and newspapers until I completed my shift. On just such an evening, while my husband waited for me, the police came into the library and demanded he prove he was not a vagrant. Unsatisfied with his driver's license, library card or other identification, they escorted him out the door and placed him in their car. They drove him to a police station for further questioning. Approximately an hour later, they released him, on foot, without an apology. They had unsuccessfully searched their records for outstanding fines and criminal charges. He was free to go. I was more traumatized and infuriated at this insult than my husband was. His familiarity with this type of treatment conditioned him to accept that he could not expect equal treatment from representatives of mainstream Canadian public institutions.

In retrospect, I understand how these experiences changed my worldview. I recognize how dress style reflected external pressures on both of us to maintain anonymity. Social pressures demanded that Aboriginal people assimilate into European society. These pressures affected my husband which he interpreted to mean it was important to avoid being noticed. In support of our now shadowy lifestyle, I dressed more moderately. I wore less makeup, and my bright colorful wardrobe shifted as more black, brown and gray apparel began to dominate my dress. As I internalized hurtful comments, my feelings of social banishment grew. Gradually, my love for sewing shifted from a pleasurable expression of artistic creativity to merely mending with an emphasis on practical projects. Sometimes, my creative inspiration and my drawers of fabrics lay together, unused for years at a time.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Numerous authors, (Damhorst, 1999; Entwistle & Wilson, 2001; Roach-Higgins, 1992; Kaiser 1997; Lynch, 1998) agree that physical appearance makes a statement to others about the identity, social affiliations and cultural associations of the wearer. The literature suggests that dress is akin to the concept of body language, transmitting meaning in a silent yet recognizable form. As a metaphor, dress sends messages that are conveyed across language, history, gender, age and ethnicity. Subtle or dramatic changes in appearance can indicate transformations or conflicts in individual identity which serve to reinforce group unity or signal social movements. Individual preferences for certain textures, colors or patterns can reflect reactions to changes in either the dominant culture's or a subculture's political, social, religious, environmental or economic climate. While visual statements are complicated and subject to various interpretations, the keen observer recognizes changes in dress patterns and can relate these to underlying shifts in society.

On the topic of cultural identity and cultural change, several authors (Malinowski, 1961; Chaney, 2002; Geertz, 1973 and Francis, 1992) define cultural identity and provide descriptions of the determinants that cause cultural change. Aboriginal authors (Newhouse, 2000; Medicine, 2001; Taylor, 2000; and Cuthland, 2004) provide descriptions of indicators that suggest dramatic cultural change is occurring within Aboriginal communities. These authors' observations show recent changes in the economic, political and social landscape are strongly influencing how Aboriginal women in Canada understand their cultural identities. Medicine believes that Aboriginal women are re-establishing their traditional roles as carriers of culture and decision-makers in political and economic arenas. Medicine, Newhouse and Taylor suggest that a

dichotomy exists wherein Aboriginal women in Canada are balancing bicultural lifestyles that require juxtaposing traditional tribal influences with present-day urban perspectives.

Literature Related to Theories of Dress and Cultural Identity

The discipline of textiles, clothing and culture focuses, in part, on the language of dress and how dress communicates meaning "allusively, ambiguously, and inchoately" through combinations of "fabric, texture, color, pattern, volume, silhouette and occasion" (Davis, 1992, p.5). Sociologists, psychologists, anthropologists and human ecologists agree that color, signs and styles in clothing have made the human body culturally visible throughout history. The study of historic dress emphasizes processes of cultural change and documents cultural adaptations as indicators of transition during periods when innovation or contact with another culture generates an environment in which groups experience assimilation or acculturation.

Entwistle (2001) writes that dress can be a key to determining how an individual, from within a subculture or from a larger culture, communicates how he or she wishes to be perceived. External sources such as television, peer pressure, career expectations and economic status influence personal appearance. Entwistle describes this complicated context-based process of translating beliefs, values and environmental changes into dress codes. She states:

> While the social world normally demands that we appear dressed, what constitutes 'dress' varies from culture to culture and also within a culture since what is considered appropriate dress will vary according to the situation or occasion (Entwistle, 2001, p.33).

She suggests that techniques of dress and textile decoration reflect cultural reformations and are crucial assertions of personal identity since

dress can signal group resistance or acceptance of social change. Dress codes decipher and communicate messages of subtle discrepancies as the self adjusts to foreign social structures.

Kaiser (1997), in her book, *The Social Psychology of Clothing: Symbolic Appearances in Context*, states that "many of the accepted categorizing systems for dress assume that white Euro-American culture is the center, and everything else is in the margins" (p.456). She suggests dress categories such as "primitive dress, tribal dress, tribal markings and folk dress" send messages implying an ethnocentric system and create a discourse about cultural struggles, "collective ambivalences" and "mixed emotions" (Kaiser, 1997, p.456) She also states "[through] appearance management, individuals can blur distinctions between cultural categories" (Kaiser, 1997, p. 454).

In his book, *Fashion as Communication*, Barnard explains that "[fashion] and clothing are ways in which individuals can differentiate themselves as individuals and declare some form of uniqueness" (1996, p.58). He recognizes that buried in the mix of self-expression and cultural conformity is the concept of the self. The fluid nature of self-perception reacts to environmental changes thereby constantly re-negotiating identity and consequently appearance. The fashion cycle parallels the fluidity of self-identity and the environment by following seasons or historic occurrences. Barnard stresses that fashion fluidity enables the self to translate personal change, group transitions, and traditional beliefs.

In the following statement, Davis describes the subliminal relationship of dress to social upheaval, resulting in what he describes as "identity instability".

> Prodded by social and technological change, the biological decrements of the life cycle, visions of utopia, and occasions of disaster, our identities are forever in ferment, giving rise to numerous strains, paradoxes, ambivalences, and

> contradictions within ourselves. It is upon these collectively experienced, sometimes historically recurrent, identity instabilities that fashion feeds (Davis, 1992, p.17).

Davies notes that at any given time or situation, even though the symbolic colors or patterns remain the same, the message may be so altered as to lose its original intent. In this way, dress is an unstable form of symbolic communication responding very quickly to identity shifts or changes in the environment.

> Non-verbal symbols are least stable, and therefore manipulation of these symbols is likely to precede manipulation of verbal symbols. Non-verbal behavior is a powerful means of conveying social status, particularly because it is often performed on the basis of habit rather than conscious decisions (Crane, 1999, p.261).

The symbolic communication of dress can establish and assign identity to the self and others, consciously or unconsciously. Crane, in her article *Clothing Behavior as Non-Verbal Resistance: Marginal Women and Alternative Dress in the Nineteenth Century* summarizes the relevance of clothing as a form of non-verbal communication and its relationship to cultural change. She writes:

> In any period, the set of clothing discourses always includes discourses that support conformity toward dominant conceptions of social roles and discourses that express social tensions that are pushing widely-accepted conceptions of social roles in new directions. The latter include perspectives of marginal groups that are seeking acceptance for clothing behavior that is deviant or marginal in terms of dominant conceptions of status or gender roles (Crane, 1999, p.263).

As individuals respond to shifting social, political or economic environments, visual statements through dress can indicate acceptance or rejection of social or political trends.

Literature Related to Aboriginal Cultural Change

Bronislaw Malinowski in his book, *The Dynamics of Culture Change: an enquire into race relations in Africa*, defines cultural change as "the process by which the existing order of a society, that is, its social, spiritual, and material civilization, is transformed from one type into another" (1961, p.1). He suggests that cultural change is enduring and often stimulated by "factors and forces spontaneously arising within the community" (1961, p.1). O'Neil, an anthropology professor at Palomar College in California on his website titled, *Cultural Change: An Introduction to the Process and Consequences of Culture Change*, stresses that all cultures are predisposed to change. Technological advancements or ideological changes within the society or from contact between societies or changes in the natural environment are all cited as stimuli for cultural change (2003, http://www.anthro.palomar.edu/). Appaduria, in his 1996 book, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*, proposes that culture is inherently dynamic and volatile therefore change is constantly occurring. He categorizes the five dimensions of cultural interaction that stimulate cultural change as the flow of people, ideas, money, images and machinery (1996, p.33-36).

Geertz in his article, *Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture*, emphasizes the importance of understanding the symbolic nature of systems of meaning as they relate to culture and cultural change. He describes culture as "the social legacy the individual acquires from his group" and states that when we do not understand people from another culture we are merely unfamiliar "with the imaginative universe within which their acts are signs" (Geertz, 1973,

p.5). Chaney writes that organizing people into cultural groups is a convenient, widely used concept that has become "a staple in public discourse" (2002, p.8). He explains that "[when] trade, colonization and unprecedented migrations of peoples, both ordinary and elites, combine to make the normality of any locality extremely relative then cultural difference became a necessary motif of ordering relationships between groups" (Chaney, 2002, p.8-9). In Chaney's view, central to the concept of culture is the idea that shared values develop through time as ways of making sense of local circumstances. In this way, the all-encompassing term 'culture' explains unexplainable behavior, describes distinctive ways and brings order to interrelationships between groups of people with differing characteristics.

On the other hand, Hooker, a professor of anthropology at Washington State University, defines culture as "a shared worldview in action" in which everything and anything from within a culture is subject to updating and adjustment" (Hooker, 1996, p.4). For Hooker, "[the] fundamental basis of culture is social organization, social cohesion, and the manipulation, practically and symbolically, of the material world" (Hooker, 1996, p.1). Hooker explains that all cultures construct an intangible, illusionary world with their use and application of verbal and non-verbal communication. It follows therefore, that dress as a form of non-verbal communication reflects a culture's worldview and is a window on cultural constructs.

In her article, *Clothing Behavior as Non-Verbal Resistance: Marginal Women and Alternative Dress*, Crane states that when a culture assimilates or influences another culture significantly, an amalgamation of traditional and introduced traits ensues (1999). When such a cultural invasion occurs strong pressures to abandon traditional cultural patterns follow. As a result, movements to regain control of cultural change develop. Crane notes that in America, minority groups are challenging

European influence and the mainstream's established ideals of attractiveness. As cultural hybrids or culturally marginal persons negotiate new identities, they merge the life styles of two or more distinct peoples. She suggests individuals caught in a cultural limbo often exist on the margins of the mainstream - juxtaposing their traditional society and a second, more dominant, society.

Crane also describes the connection between individual dress styles and the tensions created when different cultures coexist. She states, "One reason why clothing as opposed to written culture is able to express these tensions has to do with the differences between verbal and nonverbal culture. Non-verbal culture is more susceptible to different interpretations than verbal culture" (Crane, 1999, p.260). She states that, historically, group modification of preferred or accepted textiles and clothing marked cultural shifts and can communicate solidarity or social withdrawal because they do not instigate retaliation. Kaiser clarifies the relevance of dress to cultural change when she states, "The politics of style are linked not only to the struggles between the social classes but also, more widely, to the tenuous nature of cultural categories and what they represent" (Kaiser, 1997, p. 454).

Changes in Aboriginal dress reflect cultural reactions to class struggles and social pressures eliciting conforming or nonconforming reactions to their audience's expectations. Historically, the Canadian public expected Aboriginal images to align with the predominant mainstream social and political attitudes. Francis examines the parallels of image making with shifting public perceptions in his book, *The Imaginary Indian: the Image of the Indian in Canadian Culture* (1992). Francis retells stories about how non-native people created images of Aboriginals based on stereotypes that evolved and changed as the historical relationship with Aboriginal people and non-Aboriginal people in Canada changed. He tracks transitions through films and photographs which

depict images of the uncivilized, noble savages and reservations full of dependant "children". He also notes that in the late 1990s, the rise in popularity of archival images correlated with a new interest in the imagined wise and mystical shaman. He states that as new Canadians evolved from fearful settlers building a new nation to becoming masters of their environment, the image of Indians shifted from one of being savage "enemies of promise" to one of being "a problem" requiring Christian civilizing (Francis, 1992, p.222).

In response to political and social pressures, Aboriginal people were expected to identify with these images. For example, Francis states that Paul Kane, the documentary artist, manipulated images in his paintings of the Northwest frontier to appease his audience by adding "clothing and artifacts foreign to the Indians" (1992, p.21). He claims Kane did so to meet the expectations of Europeans and Euro-Canadians searching for portraits of "exotic pagan rituals" and "elaborate costumes of feathers and hide" (Francis, 1992, p.20). Francis also quotes Charles Mair's descriptions of how the societal expectations strongly influenced image making in the late 1800s. Mair, a poet who traveled to Northern Alberta as a representative of the Canadian government during the 1899 negotiations of Treaty Number Eight reports feeling "disappointed even defrauded" when he first noticed the dress of the Aboriginal people who attended the meetings. In his journal he wrote:

> Instead of paint and feathers, the scalp-lock, the breech-clout, and the buffalo robe there presented itself a body of respectable-looking men, as well dressed and evidently quite as independent in their feelings as any like number of average pioneers in the East... One was prepared, in this wild region of forest, to behold some savage types of men; indeed, I craved to renew the vanished scenes of old. But alas! One beheld, instead, men with well-washed unpainted

> faces, and combed and common hair; men in suites of ordinary store-clothes, and some even with "boiled" if not laundered shirts. (Francis, 1992, p.3)

A photograph of Chief Keenoosayo (Plate 5), who was one of the first Chiefs to sign Treaty 8 exemplifies the type of Aboriginal dress observed by Mair. The "store-clothes" and the "laundered shirt" gave Mair an impression of respectability and independence rather than the expected image of "savage types of men".

Plate 5. Chief Keenosayoo wearing his Treaty 8 medallion.(C-145608). Source: National Archives of Can. www.collectionscanada.ca

The desire to preserve the Aboriginal images of "savage men" also prompted the production of staged photographs. For example, in 1911, an unidentified photographer working out of Lethbridge, Alberta photographed three Aboriginal men posing over a body and copyrighted the image with the title, *Killed by Blood Indians*. In the photograph, men dressed in traditional clothing posed to depict inhumane warrior tendencies. In Aboriginal history, the significance of headdresses, feathers and moccasins did not necessarily communicate aggressive

intentions but staged photographs perpetuated negative stereotypes suggesting that this dress style connoted savagery.

Plate 6. Killed by Indians: A staged photograph taken in Alberta in 1911. Source: National Archives of Canada (PA-028911) www.collectionscanada.ca

Plates 7 through 10 illustrate traditional Aboriginal clothing in the 18th and 19th century. A comparison of Plate 7 and 8 clearly demonstrates the difference between working clothing and attire worn as an expression of Aboriginal identity. In 1857, the Gradual Civilization Act required renouncement of cultural identity. To enforce gradual civilization, the *Indian Act* prohibited cultural practices such as performance of traditional dances and wearing of traditional costumes (Government of Canada, 1996). These images suggest the existence of cultural dichotomies that stemmed from contradictory social expectations which glorified images of noble yet savage warriors while conversely demanding that civilized attire mirror European dress styles.

Plate 7. A Blackfoot family, probably from a reserve near Raymond, Alberta, working as farm labourers on a sugar beet farm in Raymond, ca. 1910 (C-007819). Source: Collections Canada http://www.collectionscanada.ca/05/0501/excepts/

Plate 8. Cayuse women in beaded clothing pose with beaded and woven objects. Source: Univ of Washington Digital Library http://content.lib.washington/edu/alpnw/index.html

Plate 9. Indians assembled at Shaqannapi Point for a pow-wow held in honour of the visit of H.R.H. the Duke of Cornwall and York, Calgary, Alberta, September 18, 1901. (PA-012122) Source: Collections Canada http://www.collectionscanada.ca

Plate 10. Cheyenne woman named Woxie Houry in ceremonial dress and in wedding portrait with husband. Source: University of Washington http://content.lib.washington.edu/alpnw/index.html

Plate 9 is a photo of a Powwow gathering that shows how traditional dress endured even though Canadian law banned such activities and clothing. Plate 10 highlights the existence of two distinct dress codes. The parallel images of the same woman emphasize cultural distinctions between European dress and Aboriginal dress.

Newhouse, a Canadian writer of Aboriginal descent, states scholars are blind to the dramatic changes occurring in Canadian Aboriginal communities "...because they persist in seeing Aboriginal people as victims, a characterization that many Aboriginal people have adapted themselves" (Newhouse, 2000, p.402). In his article, "Tribal to the Modern: the Development of Modern Aboriginal Societies", Newhouse describes a process of transition which he terms "retraditionalization" (2000, p.403). In his opinion, during retraditionalization, cultures revisit ancient ways and sometimes create reinterpretations of the past. Reinterpretation of traditional customs can cause clashes between currently accepted behaviors or beliefs about the past. Newhouse also believes retraditionalization reinforces Aboriginal cultural identities because as Aboriginal people regain control of the process of "relearning and reinterpreting traditional ways..." a rethinking of Aboriginal identities occurs (Newhouse, 2000, p.406).

In support of his theory that dramatic cultural change is occurring in Aboriginal communities, Newhouse refers to four recent social and political developments which stimulate cultural change. Firstly, significant population shifts are occurring among Aboriginal groups. "Between forty and sixty percent of all Aboriginal people live in urban centers in Canada, and the off-reserve population is forecast to increase over the next twenty-five years" (Newhouse, 2000, p. 403). Secondly, new Aboriginal social, economic, and political institutions are appearing at a rapid rate which he predicts will either supplement or replace traditional kinship roles within Aboriginal societies. Thirdly, a new, internally-driven movement to

define individual and collective identities has gained momentum. It is based upon traditional cultural groupings such as Oneida, Mohawk, Sioux, Cree or Ojibwa rather than the generic "Indian" or "Aboriginal person" (Newhouse, 2000, p.406). Fourthly, he observes that significant changes are occurring in the transmission of cultural knowledge and ideologies. He states, "[there] has been an emergence of a textual mode of cultural transmission, which is beginning to supersede the ancient oral transmission and the emergence of English as the lingua franca among Aboriginal people is influencing modern Aboriginal life" (2000, p. 403). Newhouse's identification of these and other changes in Aboriginal societies suggest that Canadian Aboriginal women's roles are re-adjusting and "contemporary interpretation of Aboriginal culture" is evolving (2000, p. 406).

Taylor in her book, *The Study of Dress History,* supports Newhouse's claim that the past and present clash in revival movements. She writes that the dress of cultural revival reflects a concern with the "collision of tradition and modernity" (Taylor, 2002, p. 217). She also suggests that the perceived threat of industrialization in the past as well as current pressures from globalization instigate group determination to preserve heritage and dress. Roach & Eicher, (1965) state "[in] the give and take of culture contact change generally occurs in both groups concerned, but the direction of flow is likely to be greatest from a superordinate to a subordinate group" (p. 282). The movement towards retraditionalization, driven by self-governance, promotes the retention of language and oral traditions and the establishment of modern Aboriginal institutions.

Mair's observations about Treaty 8 negotiators dressing in clean white shirts (page 23) and the following observations of Drew Hayden Taylor, an Ojibwa storyteller from the Curve Lake Reserve in Ontario, span a hundred years yet they both describe changing societies and the

complexities of mixed visual messages. Taylor, who is a regular contributor to North American native periodicals and Canadian newspapers, remarks that in the past "White was in and Native people (and no doubt many other ethnic people) tried to look it, dress it and act it" (2000, p.57). He observes that,

> [these] days, it's a completely different ball game. Native is in. The darker you are, the more you are embraced and the more Indian you are thought to be. The lighter your skin, the more difficult it sometimes is to be accepted by your Aboriginal peers (and the non-Native world). White is no longer right (Taylor, 2000, p.57).

Archival images and Taylor's observations identify strategies Aboriginal people have used to integrate new materials and adapt to the environment surrounding them. The literature and archival photographs suggest bicultural lifestyles continue.

For Aboriginal women in particular, the relationship between Aboriginal people and European culture since the arrival of European settlers caused significant changes in their social status and lifestyles. European interpretations of women's roles conflicted with the equality Aboriginal women enjoyed prior to European contact. Traditionally, Aboriginal women participated fully in ceremonies and exercised a strong influence in political decision-making. In her quest for socially acceptable attire depicting an Aboriginal woman Johnson discovered that Aboriginal women dressed in clothing similar to the clothing worn by older men, which symbolically illustrates historical equality between the genders (Gray, 1948).

Just as Pauline Johnson's Indian maiden's dress reflected her desire to appease the media and her audience, so, too, do today's Canadian Aboriginal women face the dilemma of balancing mainstream women's roles with Aboriginal retraditionalization. Aboriginal women face daily

challenges coping with both tribal differences and the changing roles of women in the larger society. Beatrice Medicine, an Aboriginal woman, anthropologist and recognized author remarks:

> Not only are tribal differences important, but the selective adaptations that Indian people of all tribes have made in cultural contact and change are also real factors that must be constantly in the forefront of any discussions dealing with American Indian women who have been socialized in a tribal milieu (Medicine, 2001, p.191).

Medicine observes that in the interest of preserving their Aboriginal culture and traditional values, these women contend with gender politics in both societies. Medicine also believes investigating the role of Aboriginal women is seriously neglected by researchers. In her view, the modern Aboriginal woman, often reared with strong tribal influences, juggles many pressures in an effort to balance the economic benefits of education and employment. Their lifestyles "tend to mirror the middle-class achievements of white females" yet they are bombarded with numerous native and non-native interpretations of the traditional native woman's roles including the woman's role as the carrier of the culture (Medicine, 2001, p.165). The result is a culturally-based conflict between expected kinship obligations and entry into professional ranks, which creates a "very real dilemma" for educated Aboriginal women. For example, these women are "often ridiculed for striving to achieve" because they hold traditional responsibilities for keeping the families strong (Medicine, 2001, p.203). The choices are difficult: either work in the Aboriginal community with low economic status or accept an upper-middle-class position in the mainstream where cultural affiliations may weaken and kinship ties strain but economic benefits will be greater.

A recent media article reports a significant number of Aboriginal women are advancing into professional careers. On January 9th, 2004, in

the *Saskatoon StarPhoenix* newspaper, columnist Doug Cuthland, who is a film director and producer and a recognized Elder, describes the impact Aboriginal women are having in Canadian Aboriginal communities. In his article entitled, "Upsurge of women leaders inspires great hope", he refers to a "female revolution" resulting from women who have turned to higher education "as their ticket out of poverty". This shift "from poverty and single-parenthood to a university degree and independence" is, in his words:

> ...turning First Nations society on its head. In many homes now, it is the woman who is the breadwinner or both parents are working, a situation unheard of a few decades ago (Cuthland, 2004, p. A11).

He writes that while this change is positive, a dichotomy exists because some Aboriginal women "are enjoying their new-found power and freedom" and "others remain mired in poverty and violence" stifled by gender-biased stereotypes.

In summary, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal authors connect cultural change and shifts in cultural identity with adaptations in garment design and appearance management. Historically Aboriginal women experienced economic, political and social pressure to meld into the mainstream society. In recent years, as unprecedented opportunities opened career doorways in mainstream society for Aboriginal women new pressures have arisen that create an impetus to find ways to preserve traditional values and beliefs.

CHAPTER III

ASPECTS OF ABORIGINAL WOMEN'S DRESS

In the following chapter, two examples of previous research concerning textiles and clothing are cited which show how the connection Aboriginal clothing adaptations reflect cultural change. The first researcher, Pannabecker, focused her 1996 study on the evolution of the Aboriginal ribbon dress in Eastern Canada. She attributed the beginnings of the ribbon dress to the availability of new materials during trade with Europeans. The ribbon dress marks a historical period between 1735 and 1839 when Aboriginal people adopted the European materials which best suited their needs.

The second author, Rasmussen, an Aboriginal woman who conducted research in 1997 in an American Lakoda community, published a dissertation on the contemporary design of traditional Aboriginal women's powwow outfits. Both studies are of interest because they demonstrate the attention both non-Aboriginal historians and more recently, Aboriginal academics are giving to the study of dress and cultural identity. Taken together, the studies show that adaptations in dress by Aboriginal women are creative responses to changing cultural environments. The studies also provide larger contextual narratives wherein smaller narratives about ribbons and powwow outfits reside. Researcher narratives have been inserted following the discussion of each study in order to introduce researcher storytelling as tool for personal exploration.

The Evolution of the Ribbon Dress

While Aboriginal beadwork is most often recognized as applied decoration symbolizing Aboriginal adaptation to European materials, other forms of decoration including silk ribbons also appeared on Aboriginal

artifacts. Ribbons, in combination with beads and porcupine quills, adorned articles such as leggings, shawls, blankets, ceremonial dolls, carrying bags and moccasins. With respect to ribbonwork in the Great Lakes region, the most commonly referred to item in terms of decoration is the ribbon-bordered dress. In describing the development of ribbon dresses and the rise in popularity of ribbonwork, Pannabecker cites excerpts from memoirs and letters dating to the 17th and 18th centuries. She supplements her research with archival photographs illustrating how ribbons were laid on top of one another and then carefully cutaway to create colorful geometric shapes.

In her article, *Tastily Bound with Ribands: Ribbon-bordered Dress of the Great Lake Indians, 1735-1839*, Pannabecker describes the symbolic nature and cultural significance of silk ribbonwork on Aboriginal dresses. She writes:

> The rise and spread of ribbon-bordered dress among the Indians of the Great Lakes is a story of culture contact and change. Through silk ribbon, Native Americans were bound together with Euro-Americans in relationships of trade and diplomacy. Yet ribbon-bordered dress incorporated the European-produced textile in a unique, non-European way, thus establishing a boundary between what was and what was not Indian (Pannabecker, 1996, p.273).

Pannabecker uncovered period manuscripts and trade documents tracking the importation of silk ribbons for trade with the Aboriginal people in the Great Lakes region. She states that during the early contact period, when Europeans and natives traded fur pelts for beads and cloth, one of the popular trade items was silk ribbons. She suggests that even though there were tribal conflicts and differences of language and kinship structures, the ribbon work dress "signified a creative response to culture change, one that simultaneously established cultural boundaries while

binding cultures together" (Pannabecker, 1996, p.274). She quotes from an 1803 mission letter by Johan P. Kluge in which the author states that Aboriginal people "never object to the request that they must not paint their faces, but they do not want to give up their silk-ribbon trimmings" (Pannabecker, 1996, p.270). With patience and the inspiration of new materials, Aboriginal women painstakingly fashioned elaborate ribbon designs signifying "Indian aesthetic and style" on dresses worn by both men and women (Pannabecker, 1996, p.273). The labor-intensive, ribbon-bordered dress soon symbolized wealth among the tribes and as a result, its popularity spread into many regions beyond the tribal boundaries of the Great Lakes (Pannabecker, 1996, p. 273).

Plate 11. Aboriginal ribbon dresses and ribbon shirts
Sources: www.ewebtribe.com &
www.spiritconnection.com March, 2004.

Early examples of Aboriginal ribbonwork denote cultural adaptations of European trade items. Today, ribbon-decorated dresses and shirts mark a revival of Aboriginal traditional clothing. Plate 11 was compiled from a collection of images posted on websites in 2004 advertising contemporary versions of ribbon dresses and shirts. These images symbolize a revisiting of traditional values and beliefs and confirm that a movement towards retraditionalization is occurring within Aboriginal cultures.

Researcher Narrative: Ribbons and Family Tradition

The texture and color of ribbons hold special significance for me. As I recall my memories of ribbons in the following narrative, I realize that I symbolically carried my relationship with my mother and my grandmother into my adult years through the color and texture of velvet and satin ribbons. In this narrative, I describe how my grandmother presented me with gifts of handmade crafts and ribbons throughout my childhood. A memory of my first exposure to ribbons unfolds and details about my childhood relationships with my cousins, my grandmother and my mother suggests my love for sewing and clothing designs is rooted in an intergenerational connection with the women in my life.

My Euro-Canadian family often traveled from the city to farming communities in Northern Saskatchewan to visit their childhood homes. My paternal grandmother lived until she was 91 years old. I have a picture of her from a local newspaper in my photo album along with an interview commemorating her 90th birthday. She had fifteen children. My father was the third youngest of her thirteen surviving children. By the time I was born, there were so many grandchildren that, even today, I have not met all my cousins. These countless cousins ranged in age from newborn

babies to some who are more than forty years older than I am. I only remember understanding that there were large numbers of grandchildren and great-grandchildren on my father's side of the family.

My fondest memory of my grandmother is when I was seven or eight years old. My mother used to sew all my dresses and my grandmother supplied the ribbons to decorate my new dresses and adorn my hair. Almost every time we visited my grandmother, my mother encouraged me to "go into the bedroom and ask your grandmother for a ribbon for your dress or your hair". Following her instructions, I would shyly wander into my grandmother's bedroom, stand as ladylike as I could and politely ask her if she had any ribbons. Sometimes other female cousins stood nearby, watching her reaction. We all knew of her treasure and the ritual. She never refused. She always smiled and gestured gently for me to come closer as she opened the bottom drawer of her night table.

Seen through my childhood eyes, the drawer was wide and deep and always full of ribbons. Every length, width, texture and color imaginable seemed to be in that drawer. Sometimes she would reach in and pull out ribbons she felt best matched the pattern in my dress. Other times, she just watched me sort through her selection looking for something suitable. I inventoried her selection by noting the ribbons I had left behind intending to choose them on my next visit to the ribbon drawer. The ribbon ritual occurred many times in my childhood so I knew my grandmother replenished the drawer in my absence. Her ribbon collection was seldom the same and I soon realized other cousins also selected some of the most prized, long velvet or patterned ribbons because the ribbons I remembered from my previous visits often disappeared in my absence.

Although, my grandmother urged me to take as many ribbons as I

wanted, my mother cautioned me not to be greedy, otherwise, I would have filled a bag with ribbons. Sometimes my cousins would gather around and help me select just the right texture and width. Then, after I made my selection and described what I was going to use the ribbons for, my grandmother would measure them in lengths suitable for their various purposes (pigtails, a ponytail, or a belt) and cut them with slanted edges so they would not fray. I remember I favored the wide black velvet ribbons that my mother sometimes tied around my waist with a bow in the back my dress.

To this day, I love velvet, satin and silk fabrics and I especially love ribbons. The ribbon section in the fabric stores brings forth childhood memories and images of femininity and beauty. At the same time, the ribbon collection in the stores elicit sensations of both excitement as well as frustration as I concentrate on choosing what I need, what matches and how I will use the ribbons. I still want them all and as a result, I now have a special sewing box dedicated to my personal collection of ribbons. I realize the influence of my grandmother's ribbon drawer has carried over into my adult years and I have passed the love of texture, color and ribbons to my daughters. In their childhood, I tied ribbons and bows around their ponytails and wove them into the twists of their long braids. I remember the days when I proudly watched their ribbon adorned heads as they bounced out the front door on their way to school. They grew up searching through my collection and appreciating the variety of ribbons.

Aboriginal Women's Traditional Dance Outfits

The traditional women's dance, sometimes called the women's buckskin dance, is a dance category recognized at most Aboriginal powwows. The dancer's outfits are usually composed of full-length hide skirts with heavily adorned bodices. The women carry fringed shawls and the dresses are noticeable because of the very long fringes that drop from

the wearer's arms to their ankles. Each region follows their own dictates, but typically intricate beadwork, appliquéd designs or ribbon work adorn the outfit. Hairpieces, leggings and moccasins are also decorated in coordinating colors. The dangling fringes and ribbons move smoothly and gracefully to the rhythm of the drum as the dancer retraces the traditional steps that represent feminine balance, pride and the harmony she gains by listening to her connection with Mother Earth.

Plate 12. Women's Traditional Team Dancers: Linda Pete (Eastern Shawnee), Roxanne Hines (Northern Arapaho) and Augusta C'Bearing (Northern Arapaho). "Plains Indian Museum Powwow, 2002, Buffalo Bill Historical Center, Cody, Wyoming." Source: Buffalo Bill Historical Center and McCracken Research Library Plains Indian Museum Powwow. http://www.bbhc.org/pim/powwow_dances.cfm

In her 1997 doctoral analysis of Lakoda women's dress, Rasmussen investigated traditional and original design techniques for "influences of environmental and technological" change. Through participant observation and interviews conducted at powwows and during visits to individual's homes, she examined fifty-six contemporary traditional

dresses owned by forty-two women whom she had selected at powwows in South Dakota. In the study Rasmussen noticed that in the Lakoda community where she lived, the term 'traditional' had different meanings. Essentially, the term 'traditional' describes "modern practices that are an interpretation and adaptation of the oldest known norms and practices as perceived by contemporary society" (Rasmussen, 1997, p.93). In Plate 12 from the "Points West" magazine depicts three traditional women powwow dancers and clearly illustrates the variations and similarities in the dress design.

Rasmussen notes that in the Lakoda regions, the "traditional female dress is viewed as an important cultural artifact which satisfies a need for self-expression, social integration and cultural continuity" (Rasmussen, 1997, p.143). She explains that in her Aboriginal community creating and wearing a dress of ethnic origin demonstrates solidarity because it communicates a collective symbol of kinship and a sense of community. The inherited colors and styles, passed down and reinterpreted through the generations symbolically convey both differentiation and integration. "Differentiation occurs as individuals employ symbols in a unique or non-conforming manner to articulate the inner self or to direct the perceptions of other impression formation" (Rasmussen, 1997, p. 145). Rasmussen notes that social acknowledgement of the traditional quality of the dancer's outfits in the form of awards from the powwow judges indicates cultural integration related to group acceptance.

Rasmussen observes that during the planning stages, dress designers and dancers search for specialized materials, heirloom objects and unique colors inspired by 'old time' costumes to achieve a look of "rarity and authenticity" (1997, p. 152). "Rarity resulted from the scarceness of the object; and authenticity was guaranteed because the objects originated directly from an ancestor thus conferring and

preserving cultural continuity" (Rasmussen, 1997, p.152). A balance of community dress codes and individual freedom therefore promote both a respect for family-owned designs and sharing of creative ideas. Designers may also interpret family beliefs, cultural folklore and personal dreams or visions in the creation of their designs.

Although social pressures maintain that Lakoda clothing designers must continue to construct an authentic model of the powwow dress, over the past fifty years, the powwow outfit has evolved. Changes in the design are partially due to the unavailability of traditional materials, to the inspiration and convenience of new materials and technology, and to the incorporation of new visions of color and fabric combinations as forms of personal identity of young designers.

Even though the materials and technologies have changed, Rasmussen believes the traditional powwow dress in contemporary times maintains the essence of traditionalism, transmits cultural knowledge and amplifies community connections. In her conclusion, she describes the traditional dress as "an idealization of native life, past and present". She writes that powwow clothing serves as a continuous link between the ancestors and future generations and states that, in the powwow context, native women in traditional dress act as symbols, reversing the role between the minority Aboriginal and the majority white society. The traditional dress serves as an emblem of ethnicity for group members and then projects that identity to the non-Indian population (Rasmussen, 1997, p. 197).

Rasmussen also states that while the traditional powwow dress remains strong as a cultural symbol, the audience and the dancers recognize that the "powwow has been reinvented by indigenous peoples "...to promote both a pan-Indian spirit and a renewed emphasis on individual tribal heritage" (Rasmussen, 1997, p.141). The Lakoda dancer, designer or interpreter of meaning relies upon the outfits as a form of

nonverbal communication in the transmission of heritage and cultural cohesion. As a cultural metaphor, the woman's traditional powwow outfit reinforces gender distinction, ethnic pride, familial identity, cultural unity and cultural continuity.

Researcher Narrative: My First Powwow

Lugones, author of the article "Playfulness, "World"-Traveling, and Loving Perception", describes cultures as "other worlds" and characterizes visitors to outside cultures as "world travelers". To Lugones, world travelers project personal emotions and beliefs unto others while they journey across cultural boundaries. Lugones defines the term 'worlds' by explaining that they must be inhabited by people. She notes that, "[those] of us who are "world" travelers have the distinct experience of being different in different "worlds" and of having the capacity to remember other "worlds" and ourselves in them" (1987, p.1). In Lugone's opinion, our perceptions of others in these worlds can be loving or antagonistic and our approach to the situation can be playful or serious.

The following narrative describes my first exposure to an Aboriginal powwow. The motion of bright colorful regalia, the unusual mixture of materials and textures, the sound of metal jingles and the voices singing all melded together under the guidance of a central drum beat entranced me. As I read Rasmussen's dissertation, memories of the powwow announcers' familiar words echoed, repeatedly, in my mind. "Dance your style! Everybody dance!"

In the early 1970s, newly married and a little insecure, I joined my husband and another couple to attend my first powwow in Northern Saskatchewan. As we drove up the dusty back road to the entrance, a group of young men with colored ribbon bands tied around their upper arms greeted us. The ribbons distinguished them as security personnel.

They searched each car for alcohol and drugs. It was obvious from the formalities at the entrance that this event demanded respect from spectators. After we passed through the entrance, my husband drove around the treed areas on roughly carved roads scanning the maze of campsites for familiar faces. Finally, he identified several family members and we pulled in alongside their camp. On a fire, in the center of family and tents a large pot of meat, potatoes and vegetables simmered. The smell stimulated our appetites and we eagerly joined in a feast of stew and bannock. After eating, we visited for a few minutes longer and then I followed my husband along a narrow, grassy path through the trees until we entered a central clearing.

As we walked along, I stared into the booths on our left where people lined up to purchase fried bannock or beaded jewelry. To our right, people sat on lawn chairs or on blankets framing the dance circle. Elaborately dressed dancers paced and mingled in the crowd. Their outfits rattled, jingled and waved in the breeze as the dancers waited for their turn. An announcer called out to the dancers and the drummers requesting that they prepare for the next round. I hung on tightly to my husband's arm and stared cautiously and curiously in every direction. I was self-conscious and sensitive to every sound and smell. Unfamiliarity with the local people and the sound of native languages made me nervous; I sensed my husband's insecurity, too. By ancestry he was at home, yet he was a stranger in the area. Scanning the crowds, I could not find a familiar face or another white person and I felt very out of place. Finally, my husband chose a spot to sit and we settled near the top of a wooden bleacher.

We had arrived just in time for the final competitions. This was when the dancers donned their best outfits and performed their most complicated steps. The dancing began with a grand entry. As I watched,

I was entranced and awe-struck. As the competitions intensified and evening became night, the strongest and the best dancers entered the circle against the backdrop of a prairie sunset. By spinning and stepping in rhythm with the drumming, they moved around the circle combining grace, agility, strength, and stamina. Although I did not understand the significance of the movements or the competition rules, the combination of extravagantly beaded and fringed outfits with the singing voices and the beat of the drums thrilled me. The circle was in full motion. No one danced alike and no two outfits were the same yet everyone seemed to know their place and understand the direction in which to move.

Since that first powwow, I have learned more about the rules. Everyone is supposed to be different. Traditions dictate the basic steps and the direction of the dance but these are only guidelines. The dress designs and the dance steps are subject to individual interpretation. The colors vary, the steps are combined in unique ways and the outfits evolve as the dancer becomes more familiar with his or her personal style. As the dancer grows in confidence, his or her outfit often becomes more complex and elaborate.

Many Aboriginal communities have reintroduced the powwow into their spring and summer activities. At modern powwows, the lights are brighter and the audiences are larger. Artificial turf keeps the dust down; the bleachers are higher and sheltered to protect the audience from the rain and the number of dancers has increased immensely. Children learn to dance indoors, where seasoned dancers share their knowledge with the aid of videotapes and tape-recorded drumming. Intricate embroidered appliqué and sequin designs often replace beadwork. Colored ribbons and dangling strings of knitting wool replace hide fringes. Neon colored feathers and amazing manufactured fabrics from all over the world adorn a multitude of silhouettes topped with short or long, curly or straight, light or dark hair.

Powwow procedures may change but the principles of 'dancing your style' and 'dancing together as a community' have not. There are those within the Aboriginal community who adhere closely to traditional customs and condemn the youthful designs and the competitions that offer cash prizes. There are those who feel the sense of community has been lost and commercialism is overtaking a once very spiritual experience. Yet, the powwow, with all its new materials and new technologies, symbolizes a cultural response to changing times. Each generation keeps some aspects from the past, translates the underlying message and which then evolves as their meanings of traditional values and beliefs are translated to fit the changing environment.

Although the unfamiliar atmosphere of the powwow elicited my feelings of insecurity, this visit to another cultural environment rekindled my appreciation for creative self-expression. In the powwow world, the drumming, the dancing and the elaborately decorated outfits portrayed tribal diversity. The range of movements and the colorful designs on the regalia communicated change and continuity. Every life has a rhythm like the beating of the drum in the background of the powwow. The powwow symbolizes the dance of life. Some Aboriginal people say the sound of the drum represents the heart of the Mother Earth and to be successful the dancers must listen carefully to her heartbeat.

Connelly and Clandinin (1999) use the metaphor of a parade which is similar to the powwow metaphor in their article, *Shaping a Professional Identity: Stories of Educational Practice.* The powwow motion symbolically represents individuals moving together as a community. Connelly and Clandinin's metaphor compares each person's participation in a social evolution as a "parade of changes". They suggest, "Parades can be made colorful and interesting by virtue of the habits of the parade member" (1999, p.130). In their parade metaphor, what is new to some

is "already commonplace in others" and on this landscape of life, the participants "[play] out this parade trend, without consideration of the interaction of the people in the parade" (1999, p.132). This parade analogy reminded me of the dress, the dancing and drum beat at the powwow. At both the powwow and the parade there are participants and observers: teachers, researchers, judges, commentators, organizers, laborers, persons from older generations and children representing the new generations. And of course, there are the storytellers who carry their version of culture and tradition home to their communities and pass the traditions on to the next generation who may have missed all the excitement.

CHAPTER IV

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY: NARRATIVE INQUIRY

Narrative inquiry is a qualitative observational research method. It is a tool aimed at gathering information about how people frame their lives and make sense of their experiences. The research style uses the language of storytelling to explore personal and human dimensions by gathering detailed descriptions of events in an individual's life. The narrative inquiry approach is flexible. The researcher begins with a trying to understand an experience which is puzzling and then forms questions throughout the research process to gain in-depth understanding of the topic. As a result, the focus of the study often changes because new questions or topics may emerge from the initial research puzzle. This chapter explains the appropriateness of narrative inquiry to the present study of Aboriginal women's dress and identity.

Narrative Inquiry Research Methods

Narrative inquiry brings to both cultural research and the interpretation of dress a methodology that takes into account, compound meanings and culturally-based interpretations. In their book *Narrative Inquiry: Experience and Story in Qualitative Research,* Clandinin and Connelly describe narrative inquiry as "a way of understanding experience", both individual and social (2000, p. xxvi). They explain that narrative inquirers must "make themselves as aware as possible of the many layered narratives at work in their inquiry space" (2000, p.70). Research that relies on storytelling is holistic because it allows for a flow between past memories, present experiences and future aspirations. As tellers remember stories from the past and recount the temporal and contextual surroundings, they recreate scenes depicting their life experiences. A series of stories taken together provide "possible plotlines for [the] future" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p.60). This research style

makes space for multidimensionality, which includes spiritual, emotional, mental and physical aspects of life.

The level of collaboration between the researcher and the participants is an important consideration when selecting a research methodology. In a narrative inquiry, the autobiographical writing clarifies the researcher's point of view and provides the text with a sense of the narrator as an interpreter. Clandinin and Connelly stress that "[contrary] to the sense that research data are audience free, in narrative inquiry, audience is always a presence and interpretively shapes the field texts constructed" (2000, p.102). The study's autobiographical perspective situates the researcher's life learning in the research experience. Narrative inquiries "are always strongly autobiographical" thereby justifying the "inquiry interest in personal terms" (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994). As stories are composed and organized, connecting lines between the inquirers and the inquiry are drawn. The research has purpose and focus but the boundaries are allowed to "expand and contract" (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994). Participant's biographical stories reflect the research puzzle back to the researcher creating opportunities for contemplation and retelling.

Narrative inquirers share their writings with their participants as the study develops. They "ask others to read [their] work and to respond in ways that help [them] see other meanings that might lead to further retelling" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p.60). As narrative inquirers reconstruct both the researcher's shared experiences and the collected stories into a narrative of the study, the overlapping narratives become a "mutually constructed story". This style of research therefore ensures incorporation of participants' voices at all stages of the research until completion and addresses a commonly voiced complaint by Aboriginal communities that their voice is often ignored.

Field notes and journaling document the researcher's inward thoughts, feelings, observations, and memories that relate to the research topic. In a 1994 article, *Personal Experience Methods,* Clandinin and Connelly listed twelve methods and resources narrative inquirers might employ to document or stimulate storytelling. These include gathering oral histories, creating annals and chronicles, describing family backgrounds, discussing photographs or reviewing the relevance of certain artifacts. Using journaling and field notes to supplement these methods of data collection allows the researcher to capture the complexity of temporality, situation and relationships. A narrative inquiry research approach involves both intimacy and 'cool observation' on the inquirer's behalf. Understanding the delicate balance of detachment and involvement requires that the participants and the researcher tell and retell their stories as both central characters and audience.

Narrative inquirers must be sensitive, alert, and reflective and all the while maintain a commitment to keeping daily field texts and journals. They must become fully involved, must "fall in love" with their participants yet they must also step back and see their own stories in the inquiry, the stories of the participants, as well as the larger landscape on which they all live (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p.81). This balance of detachment and involvement is precarious because the researcher always affects the story.

Narratives benefit the participants by helping to reveal insights into past events where themes or life patterns may uncover understandings for both the researcher and the participants. For example, Clandinin and Connelly point out that each rereading of the field notes often illuminates a new version of the same story, producing yet another story. Because of this reflective flow inward and outward, backward and forward narrative inquirers compile a huge amount of data. Dated, descriptive and contextual data are then carefully re-constructed into stories by the

researcher. Participants respond to the written version of their stories and the researcher encourages each reader to identify themes or threads of meaning.

Narrative inquirers may choose to follow a structured process. In this process, narrative inquirers struggle through a period of justification by "giving an account of what we learn about our phenomenon that is special, something that could not be known through other theories or methods" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p.123). Secondly, narrative inquirers consider the most practical methods they wish to employ and finally the narrative inquirers must prepare themselves for the interpretive process. The stories told become field texts recorded by the researcher and in the analysis, the recognition of themes that were stimulated during the inquiry process add meaning and reflection.

Aboriginal Storytelling

Narrative Inquiry was chosen as the best possible research approach for the present study because of the relevance of storytelling to Aboriginal people. Historically, tribal beliefs and traditional customs were handed down through the generations by highly respected storytellers who used oral narrative as a method of transmitting knowledge. Sarris (1993) in his book, *Keeping Slug Woman Alive*, recorded the stories of an Aboriginal elder. During the course of his research, he recognized that:

> Storytelling is a fundamental aspect of culture, and stories are used in a number of ways and for a multitude of purposes. Stories can work as cultural indexes for appropriate and inappropriate behavior. They can work to oppress or to liberate, to confuse or to enlighten. So much depends on who is telling the story and who is listening and the specific circumstances of the exchange (Sarris, 1993, p.5).

Storytellers are respected members of the Aboriginal community. Their narratives pass on the beliefs and values to the next generation. In her book, *Decolonizing Methodologies*, Smith confirms the relevance of storytelling to studies concerning Aboriginal women when she states that, "[story] telling, oral histories, the perspectives of elders and of women have become an integral part of all indigenous research" (1999, p.144). Storytelling is culturally important because woven throughout are familiar themes, characters and motifs. Smith emphasizes that story telling approaches to research "fit well with the oral traditions which are still a reality in day-to-day indigenous lives" (Smith, 1999, p. 145).

In the present inquiry, dress is the neutral, unbiased topic that instigated stories about cultural change and continuity. As the researcher and participant's described their reasons for dressing the way they do, the conversations revealed responses to social, economic and political environments. Since people are always in a state of change, the shape and content of information conveyed also changes what is visually communicated to others also changes dress behavior which may represent a retelling of life experiences in a changing environment. Each article of clothing contains a story about where we have been, where we are going, who we think we are, and how we wished to be perceived.

With the complexities of exploring visual communication and in consideration of the Aboriginal culture, narrative inquiry was determined to be a compatible research methodology for this study of contemporary Aboriginal dress and cultural identity. The methodology was chosen for a number of reasons. Firstly, research using narrative inquiry is highly collaborative. Secondly, narrative inquiry allows the researcher and the participants to express experiences holistically. Thirdly, autobiographical stories about day-to-day experiences provide a better sense of the relationships between researcher and the participants' lives than other research approaches. Lastly, storytelling is especially relevant because

storytellers and oral tradition are characteristics central to Aboriginal tradition.

Ethical Considerations for Research Focused on Aboriginals

In her 1996 article, *American Indian History or Non-Indian Perceptions of American Indian History?,* Wilson suggests that in the past, Aboriginal communities have proven to be excellent observational and experiential grounds for researchers with a wide variety of intentions and biases. She states,

> Native people have, in most instances, had very little to say about interpretations, analyses, and translations developed from the stories they willingly shared. It has been [Wilson's] experience that many of these works are filled with misinterpretations, mistranslations, lack of context, and lack of understanding...(Wilson, 1996, p.4).

Frequent complaints have arisen from Aboriginal communities about the lack of collaboration and respect for cultural protocols. As a result, Aboriginal leaders and academics are often understandably cautious and careful in approving research involving Aboriginal participants.

In response to the 1996 *Royal Commissioner's Report on Aboriginal People's* which identified dissatisfaction in Aboriginal communities concerning research ethics, Castellano proposed a set of research rules to guide the conduct of research in Aboriginal contexts. In Castellano's paper *Ethics of Aboriginal Research*, she states that "more appropriate and enforceable protection of Aboriginal Peoples' interests in research activities is required" (2004, p.109). One of her guiding principles recognizes the "primacy of community authority in deciding what matters are appropriate for research, the protocols to be respected, and how resulting knowledge should be distributed" (Castellano, 2004, p. 110). Another recommendation suggests the "development and implementation

of ethical standards for Aboriginal research should be in the hands of Aboriginal Peoples" (Castellano, 2004, p. 111). Castellano notes that while Aboriginal People work to regain control of their communities "they are also challenging the assumptions of research rooted in a scientific world view that clashes with their concepts of reality and right relationships" (2004, p.112).

Piquemal in her article *Four Principles to Guide Research with Aboriginals* lists collaboration, consultation with relevant authorities, ongoing consent and sharing the data with the participants before completion as four important aspects of conducting research with Aboriginals. She defines collaboration as "an agreement regarding the nature and the purpose of the research and the ways is which it should be conducted" (Piquemal, 2000, p.50). A relevant authority is described as "another person recognized as the 'keeper' of knowledge belonging to a group" and suggests contacting an Elder prior to gaining consent from individual informants (Piquemal, 2000, p.50). Ongoing collaboration means operating in a "truly collaborative" way where the participants review, reflect and respond to the research as it evolves. Her final principle requires that participants "must be given all the information and data that might be useful or beneficial to them" (Piquemal, 2000, p.51).

Including the Aboriginal ontology requires understanding that in the Aboriginal traditional beliefs. "The physical world is real. The spiritual world is real. These two are aspects of one reality" (The Four Worlds Development Project, 1985, p.27). From this viewpoint, stories, dreams and visions are all considered reliable information because they may influence personal decisions. A holistic cosmology permeates all aspects of traditional Aboriginal beliefs and values. The doctrines that guide Aboriginal life derive from observation of nature and shape codes of behavior. Culturally relevant research principles must consider the doctrines of kinship, interconnectedness with the land, good relations with

others and the principle of non-interference. For example, within the Aboriginal context, a researcher has changed the situation simply by being present in the both the physical and spiritual sense. The researcher cannot simply observe in the detached impartial manner which empirical research techniques require and expect to gather meaningful data. Working in an Aboriginal context means researchers recognize family relationships and secure collaborative consent during preparation and implementation of a research plan. This includes full participation of Aboriginal people during the analysis and interpretation of research. Ceremony, storytelling, listening for what is not being said, equality, reciprocity, consent protocols, language and family ties are all epistemological keys to conducting research. Marker (2000) states that "those scholars who are the most self-reflective and willing to identify what authority they possess and what they do not possess often give us thicker descriptions of whole processes with less attention drawn to themselves" (p.33).

In narrative inquiry research, it is an important consideration that the participants understand the researcher's intention, the process and how their voices will be represented throughout the development of the text. To ensure the participants' trust is honored, their continuous approval of written text and review of the written form of the research needs to be solicited throughout the process of research and writing. Honoring this trust, gained through proper adherence to protocols and signed consent forms, also requires that personal identities are protected from harm with ambiguous descriptions of situations and well-disguised names, locations and revealing lifestyle details.

Although the methodology of narrative inquiry is consistent with the requirements for a study involving Aboriginal people, there are also limitations to conducting narrative inquiries. The non-prescriptive style of narrative inquiry can become one of its limitations. Narrative inquiries do

not attempt to answer questions, do not yield generalized statements, cannot be replicated and no predictions about future behavior are produced. Narrative inquiries often provide comparable data and insights into group or cultural behavior, which in turn prompts new research questions.

Researcher Narrative: Explaining the Research

In this narrative, I describe an impromptu discussion with an Aboriginal woman about my intention to gather stories. The narrative captures the essence of collaboration and the relevance of storytelling in conducting research in Aboriginal contexts. This experience exemplified for me the power of shared personal experiences in generating another person's reflective narrations.

Recently, I met with an old friend - an Aboriginal clothing designer who owns and operates a custom clothing shop in a community many hours northeast of Edmonton. She was in the city on a buying trip and called with an invitation to meet for coffee. When I arrived at the agreed upon restaurant, I spotted her walking through the parking lot towards the restaurant entrance. We immediately smiled and chuckled while pointing at each other's clothing. There we were dressed in the same colors, again. So often in the past, even after many months apart, our choices in fashion were similar in style and color.

We found a quiet booth and my friend inquired about my education. I explained my intention to gather stories from bicultural Aboriginal women about changes in their dress. I told her how exploring my dress experiences had helped me identify interesting patterns and themes that correlated with other transitions in my life and to my identity. She seemed interested and asked me to explain how stories about dress could reveal aspects of a person's life. I described how narrative inquiry

classes had taught me to use artifacts and treasured possessions to stimulate stories. As an example, I described one experience in which I made a sketch to create a visual representation of my life. I explained how drawing lines, circles or spirals that connected thematic moments in my life helped me visualize the flow of certain events in my life. In the classroom exercise, I had sketched a zigzag pattern representing my favorite sewing memories. By reviewing the diagram and sharing the flow of memories with others, I had uncovered the roots of my interest in fashion, fabrics and sewing and I also recognized periods in my life where my creativity and sewing flourished. I explained to my friend that in this diagram other periods surfaced where my personal dress expression and interest in sewing diminished significantly. She listened closely, seemingly intrigued. I described how the peaks and valleys correlated with my shift from colorful flowing feminine dresses to plain dark jeans and t-shirts with heavy boots and how these peaks and valleys coincided with my personal struggles in a mixed marriage. Then I leaned in and said, "You would know. Intermarriage was a difficult thing in the 70s".

She sat up straight and thoughtfully replied, "Yes, with all the criticisms and adjustments, you still somehow want to respect each other". My friend had experienced the effect of immersing in another culture when she moved to Europe with her British husband. She lived in England for many years so she understood the difficulties involved with sudden immersion in a world far away from her childhood Northern Cree roots.

I described how recalling and composing stories about my dress aided my understanding of crossing cultural boundaries by causing me to explore my memories as an observer of my life. The introspection helped me recognize how I always restored my identity in the midst of chaos by becoming engaged in creative activities. She listened as I reminded her

of my fascination with powwow outfits and described how the colors and flowing designs had inspired me. I explained how the Powwow became a place where my love for dress and designing resurfaced. She smiled and nodded. Then she asked, "But how did all this help you find patterns in your life?" I answered, "I realized how I transformed and adjusted to a totally different environment". I told my friend that since that realization, I have returned to sewing with renewed enthusiasm.

Then, unexpectedly and unsolicited, she began to tell one of her stories. She spoke of a beaded buckskin jacket her now deceased father gave to a family friend years ago. Recently, the family friend had brought the jacket to her shop and presented it to her as a gift. He told her, "This belongs in your family". Tears welled up in her eyes as she spoke about the importance of the man's gesture. In another story, she spoke of a dream. In her dream her deceased grandmother visited her looking young and happy. During her grandmother's life, she had lost her hair from an illness and wore hats to cover her head. My friend said that in the dream, her grandmother had a full head of hair. The image reassured her that her grandmother was happy. We continued to chat about her family and life in the North.

Near the end of our visit our conversation shifted to concerns about research ethics and cultural protocols. I wanted her opinion so I explained that the stories would be gathered and written together in a collaborative manner between the participants and myself. When I told her that each participant would choose a pseudo name, she smiled and nodded indicating to me that she was pleased. She told me that there were "lots of Aboriginal women with lots of stories". She explained that she could not advise me about the ethical matters because she did not consider herself a true representative of Aboriginal women because of the years she lived in England but when we parted, she wished me luck.

During the writing of the previous narrative, I revisited my marriage into another culture and retold the story of my life in relation to my dress. I gained insight into the importance of evaluating my place in the research. The retelling of my encounter with an old friend signified for me the value of open and honest relationships and confirmed the research topic could stimulate stories.

CHAPTER V

THE RESEARCH PUZZLE

In her article, *Dress as a Cultural Sub-system: a Unifying Metatheory for Clothing and Textiles*, Hamilton describes dress as a "dynamic, interacting system, unbounded by time and space, that articulates directly with the larger cultural system in which [it] operates" (1987, p.1). She proposes that the cultural sub-system of dress is influenced by interactions between "technology, social structure and ideology" and that "each of these components influences and impinges on each other, and a change in any one will usually result in a change in the others" (Hamilton, 1987, p.3). Hamilton states that in the study of clothing and textiles one can focus on "dress as a symbolic metaphor of cultural values and behaviors in general" (1987, p.6). Her metatheory provides a framework for the present study which investigates whether Aboriginal women's stories about dress reflect their bicultural experiences.

Five premises form the basis of the study. Authors, Barnard 1996, Kaiser 1997 and Taylor's 2002 discussion of the relationship between dress, culture and identity provide the foundation for the first, second and third premises. The first premise is that dress visually communicates culture and identity. The second premise is that cultural codes influence dress and the third premise is that identity is related to the way people describe themselves as well as the cultural groups with whom they affiliate. Barnard states that the "unifying function of fashion and clothing serves to communicate membership of a cultural group both to those who are members of it and to those who are not" (1996, p.56). Kaiser states that the "politics of style are linked not only to the struggles between social classes but also, more widely, to the tenuous nature of cultural categories and what they represent" (1997, p.456).

The fourth premise is that bicultural lifestyles develop when Aboriginal cultures and the mainstream culture converge. The final premise is that change in political, social and economic environments can alter perceptions about cultural identity which ultimately reflect in the way individual's dress. Taylor states that the "processes of the cultural absorption of outside and urban influences now attract much research interest which indicates that [cultural practices] vary enormously over vast time-spans and that each case is a reflection of the community's own very specific circumstances" (Taylor, 2002, p.199)

Figure 1 was inspired by the Aboriginal medicine wheel and the four directions in nature: the north, south, east and west. The Aboriginal medicine wheel explains interconnections and relationships. For the purposes of this study, the following diagram identifies the key components of the study and the colors illustrate the interaction between Aboriginal and mainstream cultural dress and identity.

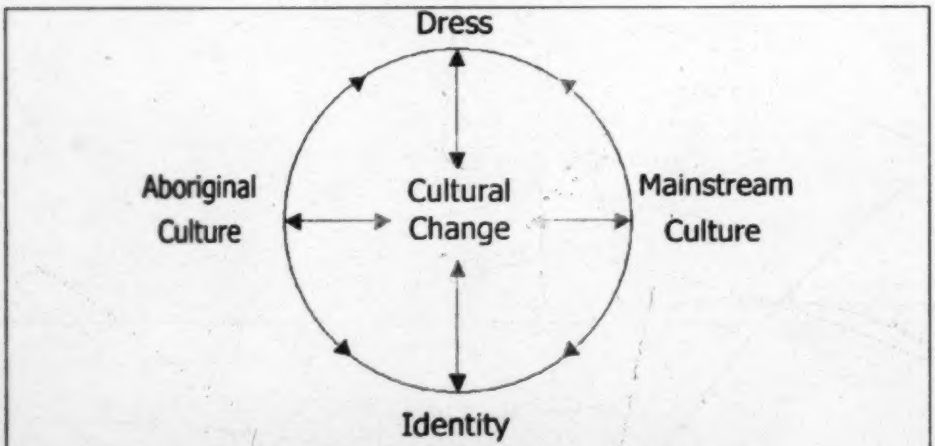

Figure 1. Components of the Research Puzzle

Represented in the diagram are four research themes which revolve around the central focal point - cultural change. Aboriginal and mainstream cultures are positioned opposite each other representing the

interplay between the two cultures. Dress and identity are also represented in opposite directions signifying that cultural change affects both dress and identity. Central to the present study is the concept that the interchange of information between cultures influences cultural dress and identity.

Phases and Objectives

The research had four phases. The first phase was to set up the study by following culturally relevant protocols and establishing relationships with Aboriginal participants. The second phase was to identify themes in participants' narratives relating to identity and culture change. The third phase was to describe specific traditional or cultural dress codes that appeared in narratives of the participants to the extent that these are present. The fourth phase was to describe the nature and extent of Aboriginal women's lived experiences regarding bicultural relations and contextual identities as these were revealed through their stories.

Specifically, the study had the following objectives:

- To gather stories from two bicultural Aboriginal women about past and present dress experiences;
- To listen carefully and identify their experiences which reflected cultural identity and traditional dress codes;
- To compare the stories of two Aboriginal women and those of the researcher in order to identify patterns and overlapping themes.

Significance of the Study

Authors of Aboriginal descent such as Medicine and Newhouse express concern that research gaps exist related to knowledge about Aboriginal women and the pressures they are confronted with in adapting to contemporary Canadian environments. In a 1998 report, *Aboriginal*

Women in Canada: Strategic Research Directions for Policy Development, funded by Status of Women Canada, Stout and Kipling recognized that Aboriginal women "are often found in such roles as community leader, head of household, transmitter of traditional knowledge and entrepreneur" (p.12). Stout and Kipling noted that in past research Aboriginal women's experiences and roles as "key agents of change" have been ignored (1998, P.12). In the authors' assessment of past research, they describe a "severe lack of information concerning [Aboriginal women's] day-to-day lives and the impact of their activities on their families and communities" (Stout and Kipling, 1998, p.12). The gap in research is attributed to a "shocking disregard for their views and interests". Stout and Kipling also stated that the outcome of previous studies is Aboriginal data full of "gaps and silences" (Stout & Kipling, 1998, p.12).

In the same study, Stout and Kipling recorded Canadian demographics which indicated Aboriginal women's experiences were unique and marginalized. For example, Aboriginal women aged 25 to 44 were "twice as likely to possess a high school diploma than those in the 45+ cohort" and as a result, they "tend to experience lower levels of unemployment than Aboriginal men" (1998, p.17). In addition, the authors noted that more Aboriginal women than Aboriginal men "possess either a bachelor degree or a non-university certificate or diploma" (1998, p.17). Nevertheless, the unemployment levels of Aboriginal women residing on reserves remain considerably higher than the unemployment levels of non-Aboriginal Canadian women. Although not clearly stated in the report, this observation suggests that Aboriginal women are more likely to leave their home communities for urban centers (Stout & Kipling, 1998). The authors suggest that to address research gaps "a priority be given to Aboriginal women's rural-urban migration patterns and the differential experiences of First Nation, Inuit and Metis female migrants" (Stout and Kipling, 1998, p.7).

The review of the literature in Chapter II pointed to a dichotomy wherein Canadian Aboriginal women juxtapose traditionally-held beliefs about family obligations with opportunities to advance their education and participate in professional careers outside their communities. In terms of dress and identity, images of modern designer fashions, examples of contemporary ribbon-dresses and recent versions of powwow outfits illustrate how contemporary forms of dress confirm the existence of Aboriginal women's bicultural lifestyles. Many Aboriginal women travel between their home communities and urban centers in order to maintain careers that supplement the family's income. They do so while striving to preserve strong community and extended family connections. This present study explored the stories of two Aboriginal women's dress adaptations as they negotiated their cultural identity while living in different environments.

Research Methods and Making Contact

The narrative inquiry of Aboriginal women's stories was conducted within the following culturally-relevant context. Guided by an Elder, the principles of ethical behavior for research with Aboriginal participants were observed. Relationships with two Aboriginal career women who identified with their Aboriginal culture were developed by the researcher. In preparation for the study, an offering tobacco, a gift, an oral explanation of the research methods and a document describing the research design were presented to the Elder. The research design called for participants to be Aboriginal women who worked in professional careers while maintaining close connections to their communities' where they are exposed to traditional practices. The final step involved making telephone contact and initiating in-person visits with the participants' whom the Elder indicated were willing to participate in the study.

At the initial meeting each woman received a package (Appendix 1) which included a description of the researcher's intention, the research purpose and expected time commitment required should they choose to participate. A consent form (Appendix 2), an offering of tobacco and a gift representing respect for traditional protocols was also included with the package. Each participant who agreed to become a co-researcher and storyteller in the study signed and dated the consent form. The consent form assured anonymity and the participants were informed that they could withdraw from the study at anytime. They were also informed that opportunities to edit and revise the researcher's interpretation of their stories would occur during the writing stages of the study.

Researcher Narrative: Good Intentions Are Not Enough

The following researcher narrative describes how my personal experience designing powwow outfits reinforced the importance of respecting cultural protocols.

After my divorce, I decided that I did not want my children to grow up separated from their ancestral culture. I made strong efforts to expose my four children to Aboriginal cultural experiences which I found in art, dancing, and traditional ceremonies and, most of all, in the warmth found within their father's extended family. My twin daughters were eager to learn powwow dancing. One wanted to be a jingle dancer and the other wanted to be a fancy dancer. For months, they danced in circles with the other children, rehearsed the basic steps, studied videos of other dancers and explored complicated moves. Finally, the dance instructor decided they were ready to dance in public. This meant I needed to sew powwow outfits for the two girls which was an expensive and time-consuming undertaking. I researched powwow outfit designs in books, on the Internet and at powwows. I discussed construction techniques with other children's mothers and visited female Elders asking for guidelines.

The design of a powwow outfit is a complicated matter because it required observing tribal symbols and colors. It was also important to understand the history of each family before planning and designing an outfit. Excited about his daughter's participation in the powwows the twin's father arranged to have moccasins specially made by a friend living on his mother's reserve. I incorporated meters and meters of ribbon on the dresses and shawls. As the two powwow outfits began to materialize, my excitement mounted – maybe more than did that of the girls. The research, the creativity and the sewing brought me immense pleasure and I immersed myself in the projects.

The following year another young girl who was taking dance lessons with my daughters asked me if I would make her a powwow outfit. My daughters told me that she would not have a chance to participate in the dance group travels because she did not have a dance outfit. I told her to ask her parents' permission and, if they approved, I would make her an outfit. I worried that I might not make an outfit appropriate to her family background. I did not know which tribe they were affiliated with or whether they observed the traditions with which I was familiar. I contemplated the expense and questioned whether I could handle the undertaking. Then one night, inspiration came. I had a dream. I saw a beautiful little girl dancing in tall grass with her long black hair blowing in the wind imitating the motion of the grass. In my dream, a buffalo in the distance, proudly watched the girl dance in the field. The girl's dress was harvest gold with colored fringes that swayed from the edges of her shawl. Motifs of buffalos and tee pees decorated the bottom of her dress. When I awoke, I believed this vision was permission from the spirit world to begin designing and constructing a powwow outfit for the little girl. Shortly after the dream experience, I found fabric the color of golden grass at neighborhood garage sale. Over the next couple of

weeks, I purchased a few more pieces of fabric at a fabric store and a pattern that approximated the size of the little girl and the shape of the dress. I trimmed the dress with white and yellow ribbons, carefully cut fringes and appliquéd suede buffalos around the border of her shawl and dress.

Another season of dancing was nearing and the outfit was coming together. At dance practice, I approached the little girl and said, "If your parents agree, I have an outfit for you to try on". She was so excited. She danced all around me. My daughters were so happy their friend could come with them on the dance troupe's excursions. The three girls ran away together, mixing chatter and laughter with dance steps. The following week, the little girl informed my daughters that her parents would not allow her to accept a dance outfit from me. I did not fully understand the reasons for their rejection although I suspected traditional rules had been broken.

During the retelling of this experience I recognized the result of neglecting to observe protocols such as offering tobacco, gaining parental consent and consulting with an Elder. I never understood which protocols had been broken but my failure to communicate prevented the young girl's family from understanding my intention was not to charge for the labor and I was willing to incorporate her family history in the design. I later sold the outfit at a garage sale to an Aboriginal family with many children. The powwow outfit came around full circle, back to the origin of the fabric.

CHAPTER VI

PREPARING FOR THE NARRATIVE INQUIRY

Respect for Cultural Protocols

Successful consultation with Aboriginal people begins with seeking guidance from respected Elders and offerings of tobacco and gifts. In this chapter, I explain the difference between tobacco offerings and gift giving. I also discuss the ribbonwork gifts which I prepared for the Elder and the two participants. A researcher narrative describing the selection of research participants closes the chapter.

Herman Michell, a 1997 graduate student from the University of British Columbia posted a literature review relating to tobacco offerings and reciprocity. In his article entitled *Pakitinâsowin: Tobacco Offerings in Exchange for Stories and The Ethic of Reciprocity in First Nations Research*, he quotes George Tinker, a contributor to the anthology, *Defending Mother Earth* as follows:

> ...Tobacco Offerings play an important role when approaching people for their knowledge and stories. This importance stems from the Cree belief system and philosophical worldview. When you take a story from a person, you are taking something from that person. You are taking something from nature that leads to the disruption of balance (Tinker, 1996, p.160).

Michell goes on to explain that gift giving is an important part of research protocols because it follows the Aboriginal traditional Ethic of Reciprocity. He explains:

> The Ethic of Reciprocity allows the researcher to conduct a study that is based on mutual respect and cultural sensitivity. When offering tobacco, it must be made clear to participants why it is being offered and what it represents.

> The act of offering tobacco allows them to become involved in the research process as equal and respected members. This is in direct contrast to the positivist mentality of "researcher as expert". More importantly, offering tobacco is a legitimate and recognized way of seeking approval from participants before conducting a study. Elders will normally accept the tobacco if she/he feel they can help. There is no element of coercion involved. (Michell, 1999).

The presentation of a small gift and a tobacco offering are ways to begin a conversation with an Elder and potential participants in the study. As relationships develop, additional tobacco offerings can open further doorways to more meaningful conversations.

Separate from the tobacco offering, gifts not only indicate respect for cultural protocols but also signify an intention to maintain balance in the relationship. A gift is greatly valued when it is handmade because it indicates to others that personal thought and energy has been invested as a sincere attempt to communicate honestly. With these considerations in mind, I sewed tobacco pouches and decorated them with ribbonwork for the three key people in the inquiry: the Elder and the participants. Inspiration came from the illustrations in Kelley's book, *Scarlet Ribbons: American Indian Technique for Today's Quilters.* Kelley notes that many tribes including the Woodland Cree and the Aboriginal people of the Great Lakes created unique, delicate, hand sewn designs with taffeta ribbons to adorn their blankets, dresses and bags. She writes that historically, plains-style ribbonwork often consisted of sharp geometric designs while woodlands-style ribbonwork consisted of soft curving lines with a mixture of flowers and diamond shapes. As the ribbonwork technique traveled between the tribes, distinctive tribal characteristics blended (Kelly, 1987). Plate 13 is a collection of photographs illustrating the ribbonwork and the design of the tobacco pouch which I presented to the Elder.

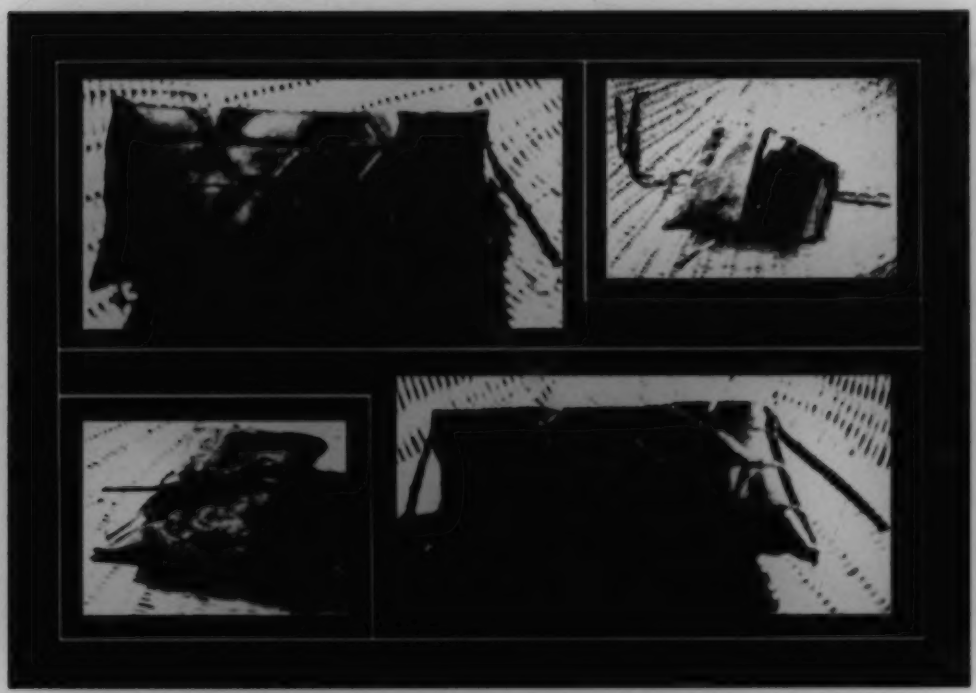

Plate 13. Ribbonwork tobacco pouch given to Elder.

Researcher Narrative: Protocols and Preparations

The following narrative describes the establishment of relationships with the participants in the study which was initiated by attending in sweat lodge ceremonies and consulting with an Elder. For the purposes of this study, the pseudo name chosen for the Elder was "Kisteyim" - a word that is an animate Cree verb meaning "to have respect". In the Cree language, animate words represent living things. Kisteyim is a well-regarded Canadian Elder recognized in his community for his knowledge of the traditional Aboriginal ways and for his activities as a shaman, healer, and cultural awareness consultant.

To prepare for the narrative inquiry I decorated tobacco pouches with distinctive ribbonwork designs to acknowledge the uniqueness of each individual contribution. On the back of each pouch, I layered one ribbon on top of a second and as I carefully trimmed away portions of the top ribbon the underlying color was exposed. Reversing the order of the layers and then placing the layers of ribbon side-by-side created a beautiful geometric effect. The tiny stitches, overlapping colors and soft hide reflected the complexities and intricacies of overlapping my life with the lives of the Aboriginal women who were soon to join my narrative inquiry study. I wondered if combining our stories would unfold the way the ribbonwork was unfolding. There were decisions to make about what to cut away and where to stitch and which color overlapped the first. I wondered if the research would entail the same type of decisions.

The completion of ribbonwork tobacco pouches indicated the time to consult with an Elder had arrived. Before approaching Kisteyim with the details of my research and my request for his assistance I attended two sweat lodge ceremonies to relocate myself in the atmosphere of Aboriginal traditions. In the sweat lodge, I offered tobacco and five meters of broadcloth to support my prayers for spiritual growth and good relations with those around me. During the ceremony, I focused my thoughts on the research intention and goals. I asked the other people who were present at the ceremony for their prayers of support for my university studies and the success of the research project.

With one of the tobacco pouches in hand, I drove to Kisteyim's new house. At the end of a long gravel road I turned onto a side road looking for the left turn as he had instructed. I noticed a tree with traditional flags of solid colored fabric tied around the trunk indicating I was in the territory of a traditional person. I continued up a curving embankment and suddenly came upon his new house. In the rural surroundings, I

heard no sounds of neighboring families or traffic rushing by. However, above the chirping of birds and the wind playing in the fall leaves, I recognized the hum of a power tool. Following the sound, I found Kisteyim in a clearing behind the house attaching boards to the recently framed wall of a wooden storage shed. He glanced up at me as I strolled down a second embankment and joined him.

Although I wasn't much help, I held boards for him while he screwed them tightly in place. I commented on the beauty of one tall tree behind his new house. He explained that he had carefully selected that tree as the center and from there determined where the house, the entrances and other roadways would be constructed. His layout was founded in the traditional medicine wheel, the four directions and the importance of thoughtful negotiation between mankind and the Mother Earth. I envisioned him making offerings and contemplating the spirit of the land before making any decisions.

After several wooden planks were screwed in place, we talked about the reason I was visiting. Kisteyim sat on the floor of his partially completed shed and I balanced myself on a nearby pile of lumber. I placed the tobacco pouch on the floor beside him and handed him a folder containing a description of the research design and an example of the consent forms. He read the material quietly while I explained that I was asking for his help to find two bicultural Aboriginal women with mainstream experiences who would be willing to share their stories about their dress and culture. I told him the research methods included gathering stories and laying them together to find themes and patterns in our lives. We discussed my experience writing narratives about my childhood and the relevance of ribbons in my life.

Kisteyim read my research plans then reviewed the sample consent form and listened carefully to my description of the research purpose and

methods. He said he needed time to think about my request and he would get back to me. He picked up the tobacco pouch and commented, "Pretty fancy". As we stood in preparation for a tour of his new house he turned to me and said, "You have a lot to learn about ribbons. They are meant to attract the little people. That is the reason we hang them over the rocks in the sweat."

Two weeks later, I phoned Kisteyim and asked if he had any women to recommend for my research. He gave me the names of two Aboriginal women with careers and lifestyles that immerse them in both Aboriginal and mainstream cultures. He said that when he asked them if they would be interested in talking to me about participating in a storytelling style research project about dress they had each expressed a willingness to meet with me.

Marissa was the first woman I approached about participating in the study. I had been acquainted with "Marissa" for approximately twelve years as a fellow student passing in the university corridors and then as a co-worker employed by the same Aboriginal organization. After contemplating her suitability for the inquiry, I realized there was much I did not know much about her life, the influences that dictated her dress or how she thought of herself as an Aboriginal woman. When I contacted her by email asking her if she wanted to participate in my research she enthusiastically agreed. In a telephone conversation we arranged to coordinate the research interviews around her business travels. On her next visit to the city from her Northern Alberta home, she accepted the tobacco pouch and signed the consent form. Although Marissa's employer usually rented a hotel room for her or she stayed with relatives during her visits to the city, for convenience I invited her to stay with me. Over the following months, we spent several weekend evenings discussing fashion and taping our conversations.

The second participant in the study, "Ambient" and I also crossed paths before either of us became aware that she would become one of the co-researchers. I attended two sweat lodge ceremonies before the interviews began and it was here that I first met her.

It had been months, possibly a year, since I attended one of Kisteyim's sweat lodge ceremonies. The old gown I once wore to the ceremonies had faded and become more transparent. It would not cover me well. I opted to take the long sage green dress from my closet for the occasion. "One of these days I'm going to sew myself a beautiful ribbon dress", I thought as I packed the dress in a carrying bag. Armed with a change of clothes, five different solid colored pieces of broadcloth (each cut a meter in length), and offerings I headed out to the reserve.

I arrived with only a few moments to change. As I sat quietly waiting for the ceremony to begin, I noticed the woman behind me was dressed in a ribbon dress. In our close proximity, I recognized the hide colored cotton fabric had been hand stitched together and rows of peach and pale yellow ribbons were sewn around the sleeves and neck. At one point in the ceremony, Kisteyim turned to the woman and asked her to lead us through a round of prayer and song. She lifted her rattle in the air and began to speak in Cree. Her prayers were for women and the struggles they face on a daily basis. She continued in her Cree language with songs to honor all women, the female spirits, the grandmothers and the Mother Earth.

Near the end of the ceremony I turned and asked her where she was from. She named a reserve in Northern Alberta. I told her how much I enjoyed listening to her speak Cree. She looked at me almost expressionless. A couple of weeks later at a second sweat, the same lady sang and prayed for the women again. This time she cried for their pain and suffering.

When Kisteyim and I discussed the names of women to contact, I asked him if any of the contacts was the woman wearing the ribbon dress in the sweat lodge. He replied, "Yes, she would be a good one". So, knowing he had already contacted her, I telephoned her that very afternoon. During our first telephone conversation, I briefly explained that the topic of my research was dress and the research style was storytelling. "I have lots of stories" she emphasized. It took several follow-up calls to arrange our lives to include interviews but eventually we came together at my dining room table where she accepted the tobacco and signed the consent forms.

Ambient described the importance of Kisteyim contacting her about participating in the narrative inquiry. He had suggested to her that she had a lot to talk about and participating in this project was a way she could share some of her knowledge. She asked him if she would be the only one and he said he wasn't sure how many would be interviewed but that it would be "good". I asked her what she thought he meant by the term "good". She recalled that he assured her by saying "she's good, she won't do anything wrong with what you say". From her conversation with Kisteyim, Ambient determined that I could be trusted and participating in the study would benefit others in the long term. He guaranteed her that she could leave the research at anytime, so she told him, "I'll check it out and see where it goes from there".

CHAPTER VII

PARTICIPANT NARRATIVES

Organizing and Interpreting the Data

In a narrative inquiry, the researcher/inquirer composes stories about the participants, second hand not necessarily representing the complete context. Clandinin and Connelly state that the inquirer "needs to be aware of the details of place, of the nuanced warps in time and of the complex shifts between personal and social observations and their relations" (2000, p. 91). By constructing a story from the research experience, the narrator/inquirer ties themes of thought together and hopes to capture the essence of the original storyteller's version. The task is challenging. Clandinin and Connelly describe the process of organizing and interpreting the data as archival and plagued with uncertainties. The authors explain that understanding the stories requires reading and rereading of field texts and the recognition that each rereading can lead to new research questions. In the transition from field text to research text, the researcher sorts through the field text as observer and as participant developing interim texts and searching for themes.

In this study, the tape-recorder contained a collection of small stories. These were transcribed onto paper divided into two columns allowed room for further interpretive notes and coding. Then, with the aid of observational field notes and journaling, repetitive conversation topics and themes of culture, dress and identity were highlighted. The first draft of the written version was edited and responded to by both of the participants. An outside respondent who was not only familiar with the goals of the research but also was an Aboriginal woman and understood the methodology of narrative inquiry also read the narratives and provided written comments. As an objective respondent, her comments aided the

researcher in the search for meaning and identification of plotlines in the narratives.

The following pages include eight narratives - four narratives from each participant. Participant narratives #1 through #4 inclusive are restricted to Marissa's stories and participant narratives #5 through #8 inclusive are dedicated to those of Ambient. The following narratives capsulate each participant's memories, values and attitudes regarding codes of dress, relevant textiles and articles of clothing that were significant to them.

Participant Narrative #1: Marissa's Background

Marissa is a thirty year old woman who returned to live and work in a community near her Northern home. The following narrative sets the stage for Marissa's narratives by identifying her as a bicultural woman. At the onset of our interviews Marissa described her family, her childhood community and the geography of Northern Alberta.

Until the age of fifteen, Marissa lived with her mother, father, older brother, younger sister and two younger brothers on a remote Northern reserve near the Northern Alberta border. The reserve is located approximately forty miles from a small hamlet. On the reserve roughly fifty dwellings house more than two hundred people. Marissa described the quiet neighboring town as "still a frontier hamlet in rural Alberta" with one bank, one general store, three gas bars and three churches. She says the reserve is so close to the town that the ethnicity of the population is blurred. "In the North, if you are not of Aboriginal descent you are probably married to one". The band members are formally described as belonging to the Algonquian Cree linguistic group, and Marissa notes that "almost all the people on [her] reserve are able to understand English fluently". Marissa was fifteen years old when she

moved from her parent's home to an off reserve, board and room situation in a small farming community where she completed her high school education. At the age of seventeen she upon completion of her high school, she moved to the city to attend university.

During her early university years, Marissa chose not to socialize exclusively with other Aboriginal students. She prided herself in her ability to nurture many friendships with students from a variety of ethnic backgrounds. She emphasized that it was her original intention to leave the Aboriginal way of life behind her. She says, "I was there to be assimilated, not to find another native group. When I left, I knew I wanted to live beyond what I knew and I thought living that way meant changing." During her first year at the university, Marissa lived in residence. Dormitory life was lonely and occasionally she called home crying. When Marissa expressed her discontent with university life, her mother would tell her "My girl, you worked hard to get there. Stay". On the other hand, her father would encourage her to come home guaranteeing her a job in the North.

In her second year, Marissa moved into an apartment with an older Aboriginal woman. In retrospect, Marissa remembers her as a "surrogate mother" who "helped my self-discipline because I saw her style and I liked it". Marissa's roommate also "had this distain to be Indian and didn't associate too much with Indian people. Throughout her years as a student, Marissa struggled with the demands of university life and finally left without completing her psychology degree. She recalls, "I didn't like the university environment and that's why when they asked me to leave. I left. I cried because it was traumatic. I just didn't have the grades they wanted to finish and I wasn't even a year from finishing. It wasn't important to me anymore".

By the time she was twenty-seven, she had lived in the city for nine

years. During summer breaks from university, she had not returned home to visit her family. Instead, she worked in the city as a bank teller, sales clerk and in later years, Marissa found employment with newly established Aboriginal organizations as a researcher, Aboriginal employment councilor and conference coordinator. Her employment experience working at the band, provincial and national levels broadened her knowledge of complex Aboriginal issues. With a partial degree and years of experience working in Aboriginal settings, Marissa returned home. She described her decision as follows, "At first I set out to be educated but now I don't have the paper or the validation to be accredited. It's about prestige anyways...everything I learned I didn't learn in university...it doesn't matter anymore, my values have changed".

Currently, Marissa lives an hour's drive west of her home reserve in a booming northern community rich in forests, oil and gas. The community provides government services, retail shops and recreation facilities for the surrounding predominantly Aboriginal population. Marissa describes the local atmosphere as transient and full of high energy, industry and prosperity. She also notes that, "If you are a transplanted urbanite, life is hell. In the North, I am surrounded by trees, swamps, creeks, lakes and rivers" which includes "mosquitoes, mud and rawness of land", and people who "live in their own little cocoon worlds".

The tribal council she works for employs only Aboriginal staff and serves only Aboriginal clients. In her role as a child case worker, she is responsible for the wellbeing of many Aboriginal children. She describes her position as "stressful and action-packed" because she may be called upon to investigate situations where "violence, drinking and other unsavory activities put children at risk". She says the position demands organization, "excellent people and coping skills" and alertness to her

"actions and surroundings". Her responsibilities include frequent visits to neighboring reserves, trips to larger urban centers for training and mounds of paperwork.

Participant Narrative #2: Marissa's Opinion of Jogging Pants

In the transcribed interviews and in my journal I noticed frequent references to jogging pants and outfits. The subject appeared so often that I composed the following narrative by chronologically organizing discussions that centered on Marissa's comments concerning that particular style of clothing.

For our first interview, Marissa changed into comfortable clothing and, then to avoid interruption, we retreated to my bedroom. Marissa chose an upholstered chair and placed her feet on the end of the bed. I sat near the headboard with the tape recorder placed between us. I was wearing jeans and a sweater. She was wearing a long loose t-shirt and light weight, stretchy gray jogging pants. As she settled in, Marissa started to laugh at the way she was dressed for the interview. It reminded her of a humorous email "going around to all my native friends" about "Indian women wearing jogging pants and dressing them up". She laughed loudly, "You know ... Indian fashion". She said the email "resonated with a lot of women who had children" because after childbirth they lose their beautiful fashionable look and revert to "jogging pants and hair in a ponytail and no make-up".

Marissa referred to grey sweat pants and joggers frequently in subsequent interviews. At one point, she mentioned that she was comfortable in the North because people up there "knew me when I wore the mint green jogging suit and the ugly glasses" so even today even though I wear "my designer fashions and my fake fur coat with my manicures and pedicures they still see me". At her office, the employees

dress casually wearing jogging pants or tight stretchy pants with t-shirts. Marissa, on the contrary, says she only wears her t-shirts and jogging style clothing when she is very tired.

Her younger sister has one child and Marissa says her sister's basic wardrobe consists of "jogging pants...with her hair in a ponytail and no make up and a common law relationship". In other discussions about her childhood dress, Marissa elaborated on the mint green jogging suit again. "That one really made me mad because my sister was able to be fashionable but I was stuck wearing clothes that my mom picked out for me when I was twelve and thirteen". Attached to the memory of the mint green joggers was her recollection of being the oldest girl who often stayed home with her younger siblings while her mother did the shopping. She remembers wearing "ugly running shoes" and "ugly glasses" and "the same kind of jogging outfit in a pale pink". Marissa's mother always dressed fashionably even though Marissa's aunts slipped into the typical gray jogging pants with their hair tied back after their children were born. The only time she recollects her mother wearing jogging pants was for a short period of time when she gave birth to the two youngest boys who were born very close together. In Marissa's words, "she didn't do that for long". Marissa described her mother as a woman who always took care of her appearance. Besides living with four other siblings, Marissa was the oldest girl of many cousins. Because her mother was so busy with five children she relied on Marissa's help. From the early age of ten and eleven years old Marissa cared for her younger brothers and sisters. As a result, she sadly remarked, "I didn't get to go through learning what my fashion was".

Although she resents missing the years of exploring her own fashion identity, not all her dress experiences were negative. Marissa has fond memories of the few articles of clothing she truly loved. For

example, once, when she was a little girl her "Kohkom" or grandmother bought her a white poncho with tassels, a hood with a blue butterfly appliquéd on it. She wore it over her orange bikini or favorite blue sundress that had a smocked bodice and ties on each shoulder. In her words, she "loved, loved, loved" that sundress. She also remembers one of her uncle's girlfriends buying her some stylish clothes for Christmas. Then she reminisces, "I wore them out, I wore them so much". She said she would never forget that woman because of the wonderful gift.

Participant Narrative #3: Dressing Up and Dressing Down

Marissa used the terms "dressing up" and "dressing down" to describe her adaptations to city life and Northern life. By identifying those terms in the transcribed notes I was able to recognize that Marissa prefers managing her appearance so that she always looks her best. In this narrative, she parallels the quality of her dress with the way she is feeling about herself, her environment or the situation.

When I asked Marissa if she had two different wardrobes; one for the North and another for the city, she responded that she did. When she first moved back she realized that she dressed more formal than her co-workers when they began to tease her. Now when Marissa comes to work dressed casually or dressing in a manner she calls "under dressing", the staff jokingly remark, "Oh Marissa, you're slumming today". Their humor reflects the fact that sometimes her business attire is not practical. She recalls a time when she attempted to negotiate the rough frozen terrain between her vehicle and the door of one of the reserve band offices. She was wearing high heeled boots. She laughed in embarrassment as she described the experience, "My spikes dug into the snow and the ice and I had to keep from falling. I heard people giggling behind my back because I was walking funny". Although the incident was

uncomfortable, Marissa confided that she stubbornly wore her high heeled boots there a couple more times because she "wanted to look good". Marissa has found more practical ways of dressing up in the North. By wearing beautiful scarves to brighten her work attire, she says she can dress up a plain skirt, dress or pants. She describes scarves as her favorite accessory because "they are the only thing I do to keep from feeling crappy".

For Marissa, large urban centers allowed her a sense of anonymity. She said, in the city, "people who don't have a history with me see me differently, so I relate to them differently". She said she wears her "dress up clothes" for the city and her "hooded sweaters and t-shirts are for the North". She clarifies the distinction between the two styles by explaining that her two wardrobes actually overlap. Her black dress, her two black skirts and her jeans are central to her wardrobe. Whether she is at work in the North or visiting the city, she simply adjusts her accessories such as shoes, purses, scarves, jewelry and make-up accordingly. In the city, she wears more face make-up, updates her hair cuts and makes appointments for facials, manicures and pedicures. Visiting the city provides Marissa with an opportunity to adapt ideas in magazines and in the urban fashion outlets to her personal style. She thoughtfully coordinates her scarves and jewelry by paying close attention to colors, textures, seasonal trends and fashions that suit her figure type. She believes her self-conscious effort to represent herself as a stylish, modern woman stems from her youth when she craved the opportunity to dress fashionably. She says "I was always interested in clothes, even as a little girl".

As a young teenager living in the city, Marissa chose to keep herself separated from her Aboriginal roots even keeping contact with her family to a minimum. When her first roommate left university, Marissa moved into another apartment. During a chance meeting in a university

washroom Marissa instigated a conversation with Janice, an Aboriginal girl from Saskatchewan. Their first encounter gradually grew into lasting friendship so when the opportunity presented itself, Janice and Marissa moved in together. Her friendship with Janice, a young girl from Saskatchewan was one of her first deviations from this earlier resolve not to associate with other Aboriginal people or be noticed for "her nativeness". When I asked her how she met Janice, she described their initial meeting as follows: "Janice was very different from me. I recognized her. We were in the bathroom and she was wearing her big hair, tight jeans, black eyeliner and black shoes, you know kind of tough looking."

Marissa says that all her brothers are fashion conscious, too. Smiling fondly, she comments, "One of them takes longer to groom than most women". As she reflects on her family's dress, she realizes that she had an influence on her brothers' and her cousins' outward appearance. "I taught them how to dress...when I was in the city we would go shopping for different clothes and I helped my brothers build their style and I helped my cousins build their style, too...none of them would shop at The Gap until I started taking them there". She recalls how a previous boyfriend used to say to her "don't try to make me into one of your brothers or cousins" because she wanted him to dress up too. I asked her how she dressed before she moved to the city. With a little embarrassment in her tone and facial expression, she told me that she used to dress 'bush style'. "When I first moved here I would wear black jeans, black shoes and white socks. Now, when I look back on it; that is just atrocious!" Then she laughed and commented that some people up North "still dress like that".

I asked her if she observed certain dress codes around Aboriginal Elders. She responded, "It depends on the type of encounter it is; more

times than not it is okay to be casual". That question stimulated another, seemingly unrelated memory. She recalled a time in her late teens or early twenties when she was into "the whole native identity thing". She said, "I had really long straight hair and I wore this Navaho print jacket with a big collar". It was a colorful, blanket style jacket and when I lived in the city "I would wear it everywhere". She went on. "I didn't realize that I had an identity crisis so in order to be Indian, I thought I had to dress, you know, to be Indian". I asked her what she meant by identity crisis. She answered. "Realizing that I didn't know what it meant to be an Indian person. It doesn't matter now because I know who I am. Before, I didn't have that foundation". I asked her if she still had the Navajo blanket jacket. She told me that approximately two years ago, almost ten years since she purchased it, she gave it away. "When I let it go, I left that idea too". She referred to the idea that she needed to dress in a manner that reflected to her Aboriginal heritage. The following image illustrates a jacket similar to the one Marissa wore. The Pendleton woolen mills state on their website that "One of the reasons for the popularity of these products is the care taken by the pattern designers to learn about the native mythologies and design preferences of their customers" (2005).

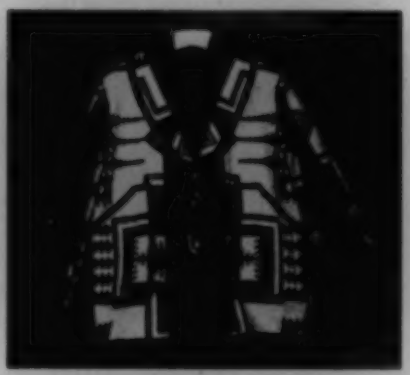

Plate 14. Pendleton blanket jacket made by Navajo Spirit.
http://www.navajospirit.com/Pendleton%20Jacket.html

Participant Narrative #4: Marissa's Treasured Items

Narratives are embedded in artifacts that are significant to the owners. For the inquiry, I asked Marissa to go through her personal belongings and identify articles that were of special significance to her. In the following narrative, Marissa's artifacts revealed sentimental connections with her family and her ancestry.

Marissa was traveling through the city on her way to Egypt to visit her husband's family. She arrived at my home with a number of suitcases for her trip and one suitcase full of items for our meeting. Before we began the interview, I could sense her excitement about her suitcase full of treasures. We sat down in the livingroom where she slowly and carefully unpacked her treasured belongings, arranging them on the floor in front of her chair. We discussed each item reflecting on its significance and the memories embedded in their colors, weaves and textures.

First, Marissa talked about a baby bonnet that she had forgotten to pack in the suitcase. Neglecting to bring the bonnet saddened her. "My great-grandmother made it for me by hand. It's all hand stitched and I keep it in the bottom of my underwear drawer". I asked her what it looked like. She said, "It's white with pink ribbon strings and white lace with blue eyelets on it. It is very, very tiny". She found it in her mother's belongings years ago and with her mother's permission, Marissa kept it. I asked her to describe the thoughts and feeling surrounding the bonnet. She replied, "I think, wow, what a tiny baby and I can't believe it is made by hand."

Marissa described her great grandmother as a traditional woman who dressed in long, loose dresses with brown stockings pulled up over her knees and wraparound moccasins. She had sewn the baby bonnet for Marissa years ago. Marissa remembered her great grandmother's bedroom had chests piled up around the beds where she kept anything of

importance. As she recalls the significance of the baby bonnet, she remarked, "It's so beautiful. My grandmother did a great job. It's looking faded now but you can tell that she made it herself. Ideally, if it doesn't fade too much and if I have a girl, I'd like to use it on her head".

Next, Marissa leaned over to select a machine sewn patchwork quilt. She explained that her maternal grandmother had made the quilt. The patchwork style blankets were sewn together from bags of clothing that people gave her. "It's my mother's blanket as well", Marissa said, covering her lap with the quilt and caressing the edges that have become worn and frayed. "I claimed it because I wanted it. I still use it but I'm thinking of retiring it because it is getting too old and I don't know how to repair it". As she studied the quilt's construction by gently stroking the six inch patches with her fingers, a memory about her childhood overnight excursions to her grandmother's home unfolded. "One time I didn't bring pajamas, so my grandmother sewed me a pair of pajamas. Sometimes she would french braid my hair and the braids would be so tight that my face would be pulled back." Marissa lifted her hands to the sides of her face and pulling the skin around her hairline back she made an exaggerated tight face with eyes bugging out of her head. She and I laughed. Marissa's laugh is wonderful and contagious. Throughout the interviews she displayed an amazing ability to laugh at herself and life's experiences.

With the quilt still covering her lap and legs, Marissa examined a pair of gray socks with a red stripe around the neck of the sock. "These socks belonged to the man who raised my father. I know they are his because I took them from his drawer and kept them and wore them. I haven't worn them for a long time but I used to wear them a lot, just to remind me of my great grandfather". I thought about the socks. There was something vaguely familiar in this idea of keeping socks as

mementoes. Then I remembered, my niece asked for a pair of my father's socks after his funeral. From her treasure, Marissa selects another pair of socks. These socks were very thick hand knit in deep purple and cream colored wool. They belonged to her grandmother and Marissa said she still wears them on occasion.

I sensed that Marissa was excited about the next item and I observed her closely. "Yep!" she said holding up a pair of worn moccasins, "These are the moccasins my grandmother made for me when I was about fifteen". I asked if she liked the moccasins at the time her grandmother had given them to her. "I liked them and I wore them often because they are very well worn but I wouldn't wear them in public. I did just buy a new pair of wrap around moccasins that I will wear in public but I'm looking for a pink pair of rubbers to wear with them". She went on to explain, "If I had a pair of pink rubbers to wear with them I would wear them with my jeans". The soft, tone of voice she used in speaking about the moccasins indicated that they are a very important item in her collection of treasured items. I inquired about the pink rubbers. She elaborated describing toe style rubbers that are worn over the moccasins. They cover slip on and off quickly and are worn to protect the moccasins from mud or snow damage. She said that she would like a pink pair of toe rubbers.

Marissa had an ordered selection process so I attended carefully to each item she examined. Next, she lifted a hand tanned hide purse with machine stitched embroidery in pinks, greens and purples. Turning the purse over in her hands and occasionally holding it closer for me to view, she remarks, "Look at how beautiful it is, and on the back there are little beads, for excellence. I haven't used this yet but it is still precious for me because it is unique". The quality of the workmanship was impressive. The purse's handle was hand-tanned hide lined with pink satin and a

zipper opened to reveal pale yellow cotton fabric in the interior. The flowered fabric interior coordinated with larger embroidered flowers on the exterior. Marissa's father's uncle (whom she refers to as mosóm or grandfather) and his wife gave the purse to Marissa for Christmas a few years ago. "I don't know why they gave it to me. I was quite surprised. They don't normally give me gifts but I almost cried when they gave me this because it's pink, my favorite color". The couple lives in a very remote area and visit Marissa's family occasionally.

Marissa moved to the next item, a black dress. Marissa recalls that while she was in the city attending university, she was invited to attend a friend's wedding back home. She remembered her determination to arrive in style. With newly established credit, she purchased a very expensive designer dress in one of the most exclusive shops in the city. She said, "When I bought [the dress] because I wanted to make a statement about how I had changed from high school". Marissa sighed deeply as she remembered the shoes she purchased to wear with the dress. "I tried to keep the shoes, too, but one of my brother's dogs chewed them up so I had to throw them out". She sighs again and held the elegant black dress up, admiring the scooped neckline, the flowing lines and the cap sleeves. "I still like it, to me it has classic lines...it's about eight years old now but it still looks new. I only wore it once and ever since then it has been sitting in my closet and I won't give it away". I asked her why it was so important to her. She replied, "It symbolizes the first time I could buy designer stuff or what I considered to be designer stuff, you know, everyday walking by [the expensive designer stores] but never thinking I could afford to buy anything from there".

As the pile of items diminished, I thought we were coming to the end of our discussion of her artifacts and I rose from the couch anticipating a snack for both of us. Marissa halted my motion. "No, no,

I'm not done yet" she exclaimed as she rushed to another suitcase and returned with a very sheer white shirt style top, "I bought this from [a designer outlet]. It's white all over and kind of reminds me of an angelic feeling. I want to have one exactly like it made because it got ruined and I'm not giving it up until it gets remade!" She paused to collect her thoughts as she reflected on the sheer shirt that was meant to be worn over other clothing. I focused all my attention because I recognized that Marissa was very serious about this article and its importance.

She explained she wore it one night to a nightclub in the city. "I really looked nice that night" she reminisced. "I had my hair and make up done nice but at the time people weren't wearing things like this because of the way it made outfits looked so dressy". Marissa explained that at the nightclub, a blonde woman walked up to her, pushed her very hard and said "What do you think you are, a model?" Marissa said she was stunned and didn't know how to handle the situation. One of Marissa's female cousins stepped in to protect her. A fight broke out and everyone involved was evicted from the nightclub. As a result of the incident, the stained and torn white sheer top was ruined. Marissa explained she treasured the top because it is a remnant of a time when she was "developing her own style". At the time she purchased it, she wanted "nice clothing, quality clothing" that "might not suit the norm". Somehow she emerged from the incident more upset about the damaged jacket than the insulting treatment. She could not explain why but she remained determined to wear the top again by having a copy made.

Marissa folded her precious clothing and memories in neat piles around her. I turned the tape-recorder off and proceeded to the kitchen. Later, Marissa started to reorganize her suitcases for her trip to Egypt. She called me to her room where her suitcases lay open and filled with bright greens, blues, yellows and pinks. A recent purchase of a brilliant

orange top lay on the top of one of the open suitcases. "See" she said proudly as she directed my attention to her collection with her outstretched arms. "I mix them all, wearing the orange and the green together or the yellow and the pink, like this". She positioned her sweaters and scarves side-by-side displaying the array of possible combinations. Her shiny dark hair and her dark eyes glistened as she held the bright colors up to her skin. She smiled with pleasure as she stood back to survey her colorful wardrobe.

Recently, international travel influenced Marissa's wardrobe. Because she married an Arabian man she has occasionally travels to Egypt and Lebanon. The colorful clothing and embroidered fabrics worn by Egyptian women impressed her. She also noticed many differences between Egyptian and Canadian women's dress, especially in makeup usages. "Over there they value white skin so they bleach their skin". She explained that before her last visit to Egypt and Lebanon she "went and tanned in a salon so I would get darker". She said she did this just to prove that dark people are beautiful, too. The Arabic women wear more make up and their dresses combine bright colors and ornate fabrics in unusual ways. Marissa explained that as a result of her travels, she combines colors in ways she never would have before. She said, "I'm much bolder, brighter and more vibrant because I am more comfortable with myself". After traveling in the Middle East Marissa said she finds shopping in Alberta limited and boring.

Upon her return home from her trip to Egypt, Marissa called me from her vehicle cell phone. Marissa said she realized that she was excited to return to her Northern environment. She called me to explain "I love the North and, today, I just realized how much I love the North". The cities were interesting and international travel was fun, but Marissa felt it was important for me to understand that she loved being Northern

woman and was proud to be Aboriginal, tied to her family with bonds of love and tradition. Most of all she said she is happiest in the setting of her childhood upbringing.

After completing Marissa's story I turned to reviewing the transcribed notes and journaling from Ambient's interviews. As I reread the transcribed discussions, I summoned memories of Ambient and our encounters. I worried there was not enough information because much about Ambient remains a mystery to me.

Participant Narrative # 5: Ambient's Background

During our first interview I asked Ambient to describe her background including where she was raised and what her life is like now. She described her childhood and the Elders that influenced her life. It became obvious early in our meetings that Ambient was a very traditional woman. The following narrative describes the transitions Ambient made since she left Northern subsistence lifestyle and replaced it with an urban lifestyle.

Ambient, a forty-one year old Cree woman, moved to the city with her three teenage children four years ago. Her twenty-three year old son remained in their Northern Alberta community. Adjusting to life in the city has been difficult for Ambient. She explained, "I've lived traditional all my life and coming here for four years, I'm really struggling with it". When I asked her why she moved to the city, she told me that when her father died she realized that without him in her life nothing kept her on the reserve. She said she wanted to experience something new. She also felt that her children would benefit from learning that "there was another world".

She laughed as she recalled her children's first investigative walk around their new urban neighborhood. After "scoping out" the surrounding area they came back and asked her, "Mom, where are we going to put the smokehouse, the fire pit and the sweat lodge? There's no room here!" She said she learned that moving into a townhouse in the city meant the family had to adjust to confinement on one small plot of land in a neighborhood of strangers.

Most of her life, Ambient lived in the boreal forest of Northern Alberta. She was raised with her grandparents who resided in the most northern corner of the reserve, miles from the rest of the reserve residents. Her childhood days were filled with washing clothes, cutting and drying meat or fish, fetching wood and hauling water. In the bush setting, Ambient lived a subsistence lifestyle without running water or electricity. As many as thirty people shared a two bedroom house at any given time. Ambient explained that even when their house was first improved to include running water and an electric stove, her family continued to haul water and cook with a wood stove. One day a visitor explained how to use the electric stove but she recalled, it still took some time for her relatives to adjust to the new technology. Ambient said, continuing the same way "was easier than racking your brain" about pumps, taps and wiring.

As a result of being surrounded by her aunts, uncles and grandparents, including her "great, great, great" grandparents Ambient was exposed to a very traditional lifestyle complete with tanning hides and listening to advice from as many as twenty elders. She says "That's how I grew up, with my grandparents and seeing old people". Her grandmother had lost a son around the time she was born so in her grandmother's words, Ambient "filled the spot".

She explained that each set of grandparents lived along the same road. That road ended at the home of her eldest set of grandparents approximately a mile and a half away from Ambient's home.

Part of Ambient's daily routine as a young girl, included visiting her great, great, great grandparents. At the age of five, she often walked along the road that joined her extended families' homes. Stopping to rest at each house along the way, she would finally reach her great, great, great grandparents house. She describes the customary trips as follows: "The first one was probably about a quarter mile away, so I would make my way there. They would give me bannock and jam. My grandfather would talk and I would listen. Then I would go down the road where there was another great, great grandparent and I would sit there and they would give me something to drink, mint tea or something. They'd sit and talk and I would sit and listen. Then I went to the other house and the other house until I reached the last one. My great, great, great grandparents and I would spend most of the day with them". On occasion, one of her relatives would pick her up and take her back with to their house.

In this extended family environment, Ambient grew to understand, the traditional Aboriginal beliefs in kinship and the value of sharing. To provide for the small interconnected group, everyone, including the men, the woman and the children would gather together in wagons pulled by teams of horses for hunting, fishing or berry picking excursions. The land surrounded a large lake and offered them an ample supply of fish, moose, rabbit, deer and berries. If necessary, the families would camp away from home for a week or two in homemade tents.

Ambient was one of thirteen in her grandparents' household. In her father's household there were approximately twenty children and in her mother's household there were four children subsequent to Ambient.

again when she was twenty-three. At the second meeting, Ambient told him she remembered him from their first meeting but he had difficulty believing she could remember an encounter that early in her life. To prove to him the strength of her memory, she described what he had worn and the details about him pushing her in a swinging. Then she paused in her story and inquired if I knew about the native baby swings. The following plate illustrates the swing Ambient referred to:

Plate 15. Woman and baby swing
Source: Indian Photo Reproduction Prints.
http://www.ushistoricalarchive.com/
Indians/photos/ct18062.html

In traditional homes babies often slept in homemade hammock style swings above their parent's bed or in a corner of a room. Passersby, such as siblings, parents, and grandparents, gently tapped the swing to maintain the swaying motion. It is said that when the baby was first born they have one foot in the spirit world and one foot on Mother Earth, so the baby in the swing is in a neutral state. During this time the baby decides whether to stay or return to the spirit world. When Ambient looked at the picture, she immediately recognized the terrain as Northern Saskatchewan and not Northern Alberta but the swing was similar to the one she was describing.

Ambient spent many long hours learning from her grandparents. During her early years, all her aunts and uncles went to residential school while she stayed home working with her grandmother learning traditional ways. Ambient didn't attend residential school with the other family children because her grandmother arranged for her to attend the town's public school, instead. Ambient explained that her grandmother once told her, "You would rather die than give a little piece of yourself to change". She said she disliked school and only agreed to attend because the welfare system would have taken her away from her family if she hadn't. She told me the reason she hated school so much was the long trip and the way other children's personalities changed in the school environment. "Although today, it's only nine miles, it was a whole different world back then. I was the last one on the trail; the last person on the long trip home everyday". She said she watched the other student's change. "They seemed sad". It was like they were "getting away from themselves" and "starting to wear different faces".

When she started kindergarten, the school provided interpreters because many of the children did not speak English. Ambient said, "I didn't know what they were saying at all" until grade four when "it finally

really dawned on me and I actually started to understand what they were saying". Ambient only stayed in school for seven years. She believes she left because she was "un-assimilate-able". When I asked Ambient where she received her social work education she smiled and looked me intently stating, "My reputation proceeds me...I really didn't learn anything in school other than to talk and to read and write".

Ambient' past counseling experience includes thirteen years as a social worker with Aboriginal people and a position in Ottawa as a project manager. Her qualifications include specialized training in crisis intervention, child protection, substance abuse education, sexual and physical abuse, anger management and life skills. In a written biography, she stressed that, "All children can learn, and learn very well. It's just that some are physical learners. Some are more sensitive to feelings. Others are naturally good listeners or better with pictures instead of written words." I asked her about how she helps her clients. She answered, "They are still sad. I try to tell them that they basically need to go back to who they are. They left themselves a long time ago, whereas me, I just was always there". When I asked Ambient cultural ways of finding oneself, she responded that she would need time to think about that question because she needed to consult with her four memories. "My physical, mental, emotional and spiritual memories", she said moving her hands slowly from around her face, to her heart and then to the space outside her body. With that comment, she emphasized that she doesn't like to speak until she is ready. "I keep quiet if I have nothing to say".

In her current position as an inner city youth worker, she spends long hours sharing stories and advising street youth about their life choices. Ambient believes the people on the reserves and the people living in the inner city have limited choices because they have been set aside by society. She believes the upper class and middle class people in

mainstream society prefer to ignore them, so she describes herself as having "no class". She said, "I deal with gangs, young prostitutes, homeless youth, meth kids, crack kids and sniffers between the ages of 12 and 29 years. Basically everything the government doesn't want to look at". She said she treats the young people who come to talk to her as equals. She accepts them and their addictions. She said, "The kids I deal with are homeless so they walk around all night to stay alive and they come to see me first thing in the morning because they are hungry". She gives them warm clothes if they are cold and something to eat if they are hungry. She works to build trust by watching and waiting for the right moment to talk to them about their lives.

Throughout our conversations, Ambient showed concern for her family, her clients and Aboriginal people in Canadian society. In Ambient's opinion both Aboriginal men and Aboriginal women have lost understanding of their gender roles. The men are unsure or sometimes apathetic about the problems their communities have, as a result the women leave their communities in search of a better life. Ambient summed the problem up with the question, "If the mother's heart is on the ground - who is going to provide the knowing for the kids because that is the mother's job?" Ambient understands her role as a parent and as an Aboriginal woman based on her life's experiences and how she was taught. "Growing up, I learned a lot of teachings about being a woman but when my husband died I had to be the man also". She said that after her husband died and left her with a family to support, her father stepped in to teach her the traditional man's role. Ambient described the man's role as "very, very strong" with many responsibilities. She says she can't return North without a partner because she cannot handle all the physical work alone anymore. She said in the city she can't feel the earth.

Participant Narrative #6: Ambient's Dress

Nothing about Ambient's dress indicated that she was in transition from a traditional lifestyle to a busy urban lifestyle. The following narrative summarizes Ambient's approach to dress and her appearance.

In my first interview with Ambient, she wore a black leather jacket, blue jeans and a red, long sleeved sweater. Her long straight dark hair was tied back and she wore no makeup or jewelry. Her posture was straight, her voice exuded confidence and she said she does not feel shy about asking for what she wanted. She seemed quite comfortable when she joined me in the dining room.

Until I asked Ambient about the colors she chose when she dressed, my questions about fashion trends and dress styles stimulated very little discussion. She pointed to her red top and explained the red color had been selected for her appointment with me. Fascinated, I probed for more information. She pointed to her shirt again and informed me that she chose to wear the color, red because she was thinking about the south in preparation for our meeting. Ambient explained that for Aboriginal people, the directions of north, south, east and west each represent a separate type of energy and that the south holds the energy of teaching. Then she lifted her red shirt up a few inches to reveal a green t-shirt underneath. The green, she explained, is for the woman's energy. I restated what she was telling me to make sure I understood, "So you brought the energy of teaching and women today?" She smiled and replied, "That is what you want, isn't it". I felt honored.

When I asked about the kinds of clothes she had worn as a child, she explained that she usually had one pair of pants and one dress at any given time. Her grandmother received bags of used clothing from someone she didn't remember who dropped them off every year or two. From the contents her grandmother would distribute altered clothing to

each person in the immediate family. The rest of the fabric was sewn into patchwork blankets. During her school years, Ambient said her wardrobe usually consisted of one dress, one pair of tights, a little jacket and a pair of rubber boots. Her wardrobe was essentially the same throughout the school year with adjustments to the seams to allow for her growth. The alterations were done by her grandmother either by hand or on a treadle sewing machine. She explained, "As I grew up, the clothes just got bigger". Although dress seemed to be of no consequence to her, in her childhood she said she noticed that other people wore a variety of types and styles of clothing. She said that when she observed the other children's expansive wardrobes she wondered, "Where are they getting all these clothes 'cause one set is pretty well ours for the year and if you grow then there are extensions".

When I asked her about the existence of favorite items in her wardrobe or special clothes that she may have kept because of their sentimental value, she didn't understand what I was referring to. She said, "Material things are just possessions". I asked her about other women in her family and whether there were codes of dress she may have learned from her grandparents. She explained that dresses worn to the mid-calf were the preferred clothing style for Cree women. Pants were not really acceptable for women's wear but they became necessary because of the nature of the work they performed. On occasions outside of working, such as going to church or social gatherings the women were expected to wear a dress, not a skirt or pants. She said the weather did not deter women from adhering to the social dictates, either. Ambient explained she often wore dresses in any weather because tights or heavy stockings ensured warmth. She told me. "To respect the Elders, the pipe and the people, women should wear dresses or skirts". In her childhood,

if she inadvertently dressed inappropriately she would be "twirled around and sent to go change". She said inappropriate clothing is anything too revealing or hemmed above the mid-calf.

Ambient admitted that when she is in the city she dresses differently than she does when she is on the reserve but in all cases she refuses to wear anything uncomfortable. She said she is not interested in current fashion trends and determines what to wear by considering the occasion and the weather. The topic of dressing for a special occasion reminded Ambient of her childhood experiences when she attended Catholic church services with her grandparents. As a child she was disrespectful in church because she questioned the things the priest said. He conducted his church services in Cree so she understood him very well but the things he said conflicted with her traditional understanding of life. As a result of her challenging the priest's sermons her grandparents left her at home where she was expected to kneel in a corner until their return.

Ambient disclosed that she may have missed out on something when it came to dressing fashionably. "I'd like to check [fashion] out but I'm not going to stay (in that state of mind)" she said. Ambient wondered aloud if "by dressing a little different, she would feel pretty good" and so to satisfy her curiosity she might experiment with dressing for pleasure, not practicality. "I'd like a really long, royal blue gown" she said quietly. I asked her where she would wear the long blue gown if she had one. "Oh, I'd create the occasion to wear it, then after that I would give it away" she replied. Then she paused to think, "or I would change it, if it was a good time". Ambient doesn't contemplate clothing in terms of what garments are the most fashionable or the most flattering. Practicality and comfort are her priorities when she dresses for work or social activities.

The most significant change to her wardrobe since moving to an urban center has been the introduction of jeans. She said, they are durable, readily available and she likes the versatility they provide.

The line, the cut or the name brand does not influence Ambient's dress, however, the combination of colors when she dresses does. In the following exchange Ambient explains the importance of color in her dress. For some appointments or meetings she coordinates her clothing "to be in harmony" with the people, the issues, the direction and the purpose. "I think about the day. I think about the seasons and the year. I put a lot of thought into these things, always, and the directions. It's really traditional thinking. What I wear and the particular color is worn because of what's happening and where I am wearing it". Her decisions about the effects of the color she wears are complex. She said sometimes the color combinations she chooses represent more than one purpose depending upon the impact she wants. Her choice of color reflects the type of energy she brings to the meeting or event.

Participant Narrative #7: Ribbon Dresses and Ribbon Shirts.

Before one of our scheduled meetings, Ambient called to inquire if her boyfriend could be present. Although I thought that he might influence the interview, I agreed to his attendance. In retrospect, his contribution to the interview brought greater depth to our conversations.

In our discussions about color, I asked Ambient about the ribbon dress I observed her wearing in the sweat lodge ceremony. She explained she made the ribbon dress for herself for a Sundance. The ribbon colors of soft, pale yellow and peach were stitched on a light brown "T" shaped dress. She described the reasons she chose those colors as follows, "I really needed to feel connected to the earth and I needed that yellow for the moon and I really needed the sun to dance with me. The

orange is for the sun". I asked why the colors were not bolder, brighter hues of yellow and orange. She responded, "I can't depend, always, on everything else. I have to do things myself. The colors are not predominant because this is my task; this is what I have to do."

In another interview, I continued our discussion about colors, ribbons and traditional codes of dress. Ambient expressed her concern that my questions were too broad. Her boyfriend had come to observe the interview. He suggested I offer her more tobacco because the conversation required sharing traditional teachings. Ambient concurred with him and said, "If you want traditional teachings then you give me more tobacco. If you have plain questions, then I'll answer the questions". Following her instructions, I offered Ambient four cigarettes and asked her to describe some of the ceremonies she had participated in and to explain the codes of dress for these ceremonies. She responded by explaining that she has attended Sundances, Giveaways and Medicine Lodges. In her experience, round dances and powwows are not considered ceremonies with codes of dress. They are a form of celebration which began in her area of Northern Alberta during later years of her life. As a child, she said she observed many traditional ceremonies but did not participate.

As an example, to describe codes of dress, she referred to the traditional use of the ribbon shirt. Certain ribbon shirts "are earned" and are only worn at certain times, she said. Some ribbon shirts are worn to powwows or general gatherings, other ribbon shirts are made for specific reasons and ceremonies. They are "a protocol" and a "rite of passage for women and men". She explained that in the North, Cree people don't really like lots and lots of ribbons because each color has its own way or flow. "The color of the shirt and the colors of the ribbons work together". She continued, "The rainbow ribbon shirt has a lot of energy so you only

wear it when you are in a ceremony - not only a pipe ceremony but the big lodge ceremonies in the dark or ceremonies like the Sundance or the Giveaway. The Giveaway is a ceremony that lasts four day and four nights".

She said the rainbow ribbon shirt is sewn by an older woman for the person needing that energy. It is worn to attract the powers of the elements and to attract the spirits that can help the wearer with their prayers or cure their sickness. When the ceremony is over, the ribbon shirt is kept to be worn again to help others. "They wouldn't give it away. Those things you don't give, then you are just throwing away what you have earned". Preparing clothing for ceremonies involves careful consideration and a thorough understanding of traditional significance by the person intending to wear the article. I asked Ambient to explain the significance of the ribbons on the ribbon shirt and ribbon dress. "Ribbons are used in a lot of medicine, depending on the kind of medicine" she explained. She told me that one thing ribbons do is they attract the little people who live in a secret world and are most often seen by children and old people. She said the little people sound like children playing. Ribbons attract children, too.

I asked Ambient about the significance of black fabric or black ribbons. "I've prayed and participated in sweats with people who use black but up North we don't. The Cree don't use black because black is darkness, the unknown". At this point Ambient recalled a story her father once told her. She said, he described a period of time when everyone had to be indoors before the sun set. They called those times 'the dark times' because when the night settled in they could hear strange noises and movements around them. During those nights, it was considered very dangerous to interact with the energies of the darkness so as a result the Cree dress code dictates that black fabric or ribbons are not used in any

ceremonies. She explained that Cree people can wear black in their casual or formal wear outside of ceremonies but black is avoided whenever a sacred place or action is anticipated. To emphasize the importance of avoiding darkness, Ambient described one couple who lived on her "trail of visiting all my great grandparents". She said "On my way back, I would stop there but they would be gone to bed before the sun set. Always, they never stayed up past sun set". There were days when the sun set by five o'clock in the afternoon and they would be asleep.

Participant Narrative #8: Ambient's Boyfriend's Moccasins

The presence of Ambient's boyfriend changed the dynamics of our interviews. I reminded Ambient that she had not chosen a pseudo name for herself, yet. Previously she indicated she needed time to think of a name but she was still unsure. She turned to her boyfriend and asked if he had any ideas. He leaned over the dining room table, placed his head in his hands and thought very carefully and then spoke, "I have two names: one is Silver Fox and the other is Ambient Light or Ambient Energy". Looking at her and then at me, he explained that an ambient light is a natural light and powerful light. She liked the one word version and "Ambient "became her pseudo name for the purposes of this study.

Ambient entered into a relationship with her boyfriend after she moved to the city. Beginning as a friendship, the two began living together and their relationship gradually grew more intimate. A discussion about moccasins began when Ambient gestured toward him and announced "I just gave him a pair of moccasins". In her view, the gift represented many things and marked an important stage in their relationship. She said she "debated on this for some time" because "he needs a lot of assistance and a lot of help with himself so I had moccasins

made for him". At one point in their relationship, Ambient said she and her boyfriend almost separated. During this time he asked for his moccasins and she told him he couldn't have them because "they need a stable place and you don't have one so you can't wear them. They need to be used in a good way". Her boyfriend confirmed the significance of the moccasins to their relationship.

He said, an Elder taught him that moccasins were embedded with prayers and respectful actions such as smudging before the hunt, after the animal was killed and during the preparation of the meat, weapons or clothing. The Elder explained that measures are taken to ensure the animal's sacrifice is respected and the positive energy of good intentions remains intact throughout the process. Ambient agreed and confirmed her boyfriend's words, "It's all done with prayer". Her boyfriend again interjected, "Whoever in that chain breaks that chain so the hide no longer has that purpose anymore. It's disrespectful".

When Ambient "put the call out" for a pair of moccasins the action required careful consideration regarding where the materials were gathered from. The hunt, the preparation of the hide and planning of the moccasin's construction were all interconnected. The process unfolded naturally without deadlines or special demands. For example, Ambient said she wasn't sure if she wanted beads on the moccasins when she ordered them but when they arrived they had dark blue, light blue, white and pink beadwork. Ambient said "It is fine that they are that way because the old lady that made them knows something more than I do, so I don't question".

Ambient's boyfriend shared his intentions for the moccasins. He said he would wear them when they went up North or to attend specific ceremonies. He gestured towards Ambient, explaining, "She told me how to winterize them and prepare them for outside or for the summertime".

Ambient elaborated on the importance of wearing the moccasins in a "good way". If he wore them to "a negative place like a bar or showed disrespect to himself or another person...they would disappear". Ambient continually observes his behavior and demonstrates concern about his lifestyle, especially when he wears the moccasins. She explained, "His signature is already in them. The moccasins are already a part of him. That's why I hang on to them. They are safe with me. Because of his behavior, even today, he doesn't wear them. I'm keeping them....the outcome is still to be determined".

Ambient's boyfriend brought an unplanned dynamic into the research and his contribution aided our conversations. In the previous narrative Ambient and her boyfriend explained many traditional codes of behavior. The moccasins symbolized respect for Elders' wisdom about the land, the hunt, wildlife and relationships. Ambient's waited for the moccasins without expectations which also stressed the importance of allowing things to happen in a natural order.

CHAPTER VIII

REVERBERATIONS AND TRANSFORMATIONS

Narrative reverberations are echoes and plotlines that resound throughout the stories of lived experiences. In this way, narrative inquiries often reveal subtle reoccurring themes. Narratives are the foundation of human discourse. They construct cultural realities, make sense of experiences and assist understanding of different points of view. Bateson, in the introductory chapter of her book "Composing a Life", states that "One of the striking facts of most lives is the reoccurrence of threads of continuity, the re-echoing of earlier themes, even across deep rifts of change" (1989, p.8). Transformative narratives shift thinking or perspectives for the reader and the storyteller. For example, when Marissa first described the North she spoke of trees, swamps, creeks, lakes and rivers" plagued with "mosquitoes, mud and rawness of land", and she described Northern residents as people who "live in their own little cocoon worlds". Her description did not resonate with tones of appreciation for her life in the North. On her return from a trip to Egypt, Marissa changed her perspective and her opinion of the North. She realized she loved the land and the people surrounding her Northern life.

The following describes Marissa's responses to my written interpretation of her stories that described her life in the North, her past experiences in the city and the portrayals of her stroll through her memory-filled artifacts. She giggled as she read about her coworkers comment "Oh Marissa, you're slumming today". She frowned when she found timeline inconsistencies and tears ran down her cheeks when she read the passage describing her grandparents' socks. Because I wrote about her experiences in chronological order, Marissa quickly recognized an underlying metaphor connecting her reference to footwear with her

ancestral roots. She also realized the chronological organization revealed crucial points in her life when she moved away from home and when she returned to the North. She said the first turning point was when she was fifteen years old because this was the first time she was able to dictate her own dress choices. A second transitional point occurred at eighteen years of age when she moved to the city to attend university and the third happened at the age of twenty-seven when she moved back to her Northern roots. She said she felt her return to the North marked a very important choice in her life.

Marissa also noted that her dress visually communicated her belief that she "always felt different" no matter where she lived. Marissa believed my researcher interpretation of her narratives did not to capture her extensive career background and familiarity with Aboriginal culture. The topic of dress did not stimulate discussions about her career and Marissa noticed that her dress reflected influences from other Aboriginal women she met working for Aboriginal organizations. She said, "Native people are the same at all levels, just more refined in the larger organizations". In the past, Marissa had coordinated and attended conferences where she met Aboriginal women from all over North America. She also expressed a concern that her identity in the study would be recognized because someone may recognize her situation and the "moccasin telegraph" is so efficient. She explained that when, "People ask who you are they associate you with your family and the area where you grew up". As a result of her concern she scrutinized my writing carefully to ensure connections to her were well disguised or eliminated.

Ambient read my interpretation of her narratives quietly, occasionally smiling but most often concentrating seriously on its contents. Ambient had no corrections or comments to make so I asked her how she would perceive the narrative if she was not the woman being described. I wondered if personal detachment from the narratives would

reveal a theme or plotline to her. She responded smiling, "I would shake her hand, first thing". To clarify what she meant, she said, "There are certain people that I will go up to and shake their hand to show respect and acknowledgement of who they were and who they are". Ambient connected the research to the traditional importance of storytelling. In her response she told another story which revealed her belief that identity was genetic.

She talked about her use of storytelling as a method to teach her boyfriend about the Aboriginal culture. She smiled, describing his frustration whenever she repeated the same stories. She explained her reasons for repetition. "If I tell him something, it is for that lesson and then the next time I tell it, it's a different lesson, a bigger lesson". She elaborated. "I'll tell the story as many times as it takes, then I'll tell a little bit more". Ambient confided that sometimes she gets frustrated because her boyfriend does not have past exposure to his culture even though he has Aboriginal ancestry. She says, "He owns a lot of memories of nothing about his culture but everything comes so easy to him because of his genetics. It's in his cells". In further discussions, Ambient recognized gaps in the narratives, such as her role as an inner city youth worker and the impact of being widowed which resulted in her assuming the traditional role of a man. The final version was edited to include those aspects of her life.

From our interviews and the editing process it became evident that the word 'traditional' meant something different to each participant. The following discussion explores what it means to be a traditional Aboriginal woman. The significance of the word traditional is important to this study because one of the research objectives was to identify traditional codes in bicultural women's dress.

A Reverberating Theme: What does it mean to be traditional?

Taylor defines 'traditional' as something inherited from the past (2002, p.201). In the previous literature review, Newhouse described a current trend in Aboriginal communities towards "relearning and reinterpreting traditional ways..."(Newhouse, 2000). He described the re-evaluation and translation of traditional values and beliefs using the term 'retraditionalization'. Crane (1999) stated that influences from another culture can cause an amalgamation of traditional and introduced traits. In this study about dress, identity and cultural change, an unspoken question about the meaning of the word 'traditional' reverberated throughout. Early in the inquiry it became evident that each participant understood the word 'traditional' as applied to Aboriginal people to mean something different. The participants described traditional Aboriginal people from their families as those who followed inherited lifestyles on a daily basis.

For Ambient, being traditional meant living a subsistence lifestyle where hunting, fishing and gathering practices involved respectful actions and a broad spiritual understanding of connections with the land. The Elders in Ambient's kinship group ensured continuity in traditional knowledge by orally passing cultural beliefs and values on to her. Throughout her narratives, Ambient's adherence to the traditional practices was evidenced especially in her approach to storytelling and dress. Traditional people are practical and do not retain unnecessary material goods. She also explained that items of monetary value do not interest her. She distributes clothing, jewelry and anything else that is not currently being used to those who may benefit from their use more. Ambient, being a woman who was raised in a very traditional manner, did not understand my inquiries about treasured clothing or artifacts that were stored because of their significance. In her explanation of the moccasins which she is protecting until her boyfriend earns the right to wear them, she demonstrated observance of inherited procedures and

attitudes. The moccasins will disappear or be given away if her boyfriend's behavior is not worthy.

Ambient understood 'traditional' to indicate a way of life that could not exist in urban surroundings whereas Marissa understood traditional to mean a way of thinking that could adapt to new surroundings anywhere in the world. She said that cultures always change and adapt. Marissa believed that living away from the territory of her origin and changing her lifestyle did not dilute her Aboriginal ancestry or her strong beliefs about the land, the people and the values her cultural group share.

Marissa's narratives that were stimulated by her cherished items revealed significant information about her cultural belief in the importance of kinship ties. Her attachments to specific artifacts bonded her to memories of her grandparents, her family and her ancestral roots. Her suitcase contained a mixture of distinctly Aboriginal artifacts and contemporary designer clothing signifying a bicultural influence. The importance of her moccasins which she received from her grandmother at age fifteen and the hand tanned purse that she received from a very traditional branch of her family symbolically demonstrated a reverence for her traditional background. Her assortment of treasured belongings mixed handmade artifacts from family members with designer clothing and a machine sewn quilt made from scraps of recycled material. The narratives about her artifacts released fond memories of the past and revealed the importance of dramatic events in her life in which Marissa shared thoughts about identity renegotiation, kinship and acceptance of cultural change. The recent addition of internationally inspired garments to her wardrobe suggests that her cultural experiences are expanding globally.

Researcher Narrative: Seeing myself in the mirror

In narrative inquiry, the storyteller becomes aware of himself or herself as a co-participant reviewing the plot of the story of his or her life as seen in the context of the other participant narratives. Many parallels between Marissa, Ambient and I rippled through our narratives. All three of us are bicultural women I am just standing on the other side of the metaphorical mirror.

When I reflected on the research experience I visualized myself looking into a mirror. In the mirror, I saw the two participants, Marissa and Ambient looking back at me. At the time of the study, Marissa was twenty years younger than I and Ambient is ten years younger. Together, we represent three decades of bicultural experiences. In the mirror image, Marissa is a reflection of me in my youth before I married and had children. At that time, I was enthusiastic about dressing in bright colors and wearing trendy hairstyles. Ambient's image reminded me of images of my life as a single parent fulfilling male and the female roles for my children. By looking into the mirror, I realized that over the past thirty years cultural borders have faded and intermarriage is more common. Other surprising parallels evolved as I studied my reflection in Marissa and Ambience.

For example, during the composing of the narratives, the relevance of the colors mint green and pink from Marissa's childhood also resonated in my narratives. In the photograph on page 11 in the first chapter, I wore a mint green top with rose colored flowers embroidered on it. Other members of my family also wore mint green and pinks. I wondered if Marissa's mother bought trendy colors for her daughter and Marissa didn't understand that the mint green and pink joggers were fashionable at the time. The photo was taken in 1975 and by 1985, I had four children and my marriage ended in 1989. By the time I entered university

my appearance had become more masculine looking because I wore practical clothing. Heavy practical boots replaced high heels and denim jeans dominated my wardrobe. I never wore a skirt or dress.

In my field notes, I noted my surprise when I heard Marissa describe Janice as tough. From Marissa's comment I wondered if I had looked tough too. That thought made me re-evaluate my self perception when I first entered university and recognize that I was a single mother choosing to take on a heavy responsibility as a university student. I met Janice the first day of university. I remembered that we both were wearing the same shoes so I asked Janice if she recently bought her shoes because my shoes were brand new. She seemed shy. She glanced down at both our shoes, and then smiled at me. I certainly did not remember Janice as a tough girl. I do, however, remember purchasing new shoes for my first day in university. Every year, for the beginning of the university fall term I would prepare for classes with a new pair of durable, black boot cut, all season shoes and a warm winter coat. I specifically chose sturdy shoes that would comfortably carry me between the buildings of the university campus in all weather conditions. In retrospect, the newness seemed to mark a beginning of a new journey similar to Marissa's moccasins which she received when she was fifteen and the moccasins that mark the relationship between Ambient and her boyfriend.

After my children were born, my wardrobe's brightness diminished in response to the necessity to become practical and less absorbed with my appearance. Functioning as a single parent with four children was demanding and Ambient's life experiences paralleled mine in that sense. Her husband died and she also raised four children alone. I envied her the opportunity to learn the man's role from her father. My father lived in

another province and he rarely provided advice concerning my lifestyle. Both our fathers had recently passed away but her father's passing dramatically altered her life.

Ambient reflected other aspects of my life back to me. Her household was full and her life involved helping others survive in a harsh environment. She often opened her home to others and I recalled doing the same thing for many years. More than one unrelated teenager completed their high school education under my roof. During those years as a mother I gave all that I had to my children and my practical durable wardrobe reflected those priorities.

Tying the Ends Together

In the collection of narratives about dress and identity, bicultural experiences rippled through the participants' lives. Marissa's bicultural experiences included moving to the city to gain an education and then moving back North. These moves stimulated conversations about the differences between her rural dress and urban dress. Marissa was very young when she moved to the city to attend university. She stated that her intention was to explore other ways of life and that plotline continues in her life. Marissa's mother dressed fashionably and Marissa continues the legacy of adapting quickly to fashion trends.

The narratives also provided insight into how each individual's perceptions of the past and present offered windows into the future. For example, Marissa's choice of grey joggers reflected times when she felt tired yet she believed other woman wore the joggers because they had children. Marissa plans to have children and continue in her career as a social worker. In the future she may resort to wearing gray joggers more often because of the demands of being a mother and a career woman at the same time. As a metaphor, Marissa's international dress adaptations characterized her negotiation of cultural identities in both traditional

Aboriginal and contemporary international environments. Marissa enjoyed the occasional return to the city because of the autonomy it gave her. She continues to explore other cultures but remains committed to her Northern roots as the foundation of her identity as an Aboriginal woman.

Ambient, on the other hand, moved to the city later in her life. In her urban life, she felt crowded and disconnected. Her determination not to assimilate another culture's beliefs and values began in her early school years and continues as a narrative plotline. The women in Ambient's family adopted pants because of their practicality to the work they did and Ambient continued that plotline of wearing practical clothing in her adoption of blue jeans. Ambient's narratives about dress revealed traditional knowledge rich in content, which often began and ended with an article of clothing not always belonging to her. Her narratives about the ribbon shirts and the moccasins communicated traditional values and beliefs but were not articles that were made for her. In her stories, she emphasized that she preferred to give away anything that was not being used. Ambient wondered if she missed something by not dressing for pleasure and confided that she wanted a long blue gown but she also stated that she would change the dress or give it away once she had worn it.

In this study, the topic of dress became excellent stimuli for the storytellers and the researcher as opportunities to examine changes in appearance according to changing circumstances. Conversations about manners of dress allowed each participant the opportunity to voice associations with the past, affiliations with other people and personal viewpoints about their roles as mothers and as career women. This narrative inquiry into dress and cultural identity revealed both the intended communication of the wearer and an interpretation of associated meanings. Thoughts and memories in storied form placed articles of clothing and personal belongings in situational contexts that yielded more

than descriptions of artifacts and material goods. Each participant evaluated the relevance of dress differently. Values and beliefs inherited from cultural interactions, family relationships and childhood experiences resounded throughout the participant's descriptions of dress and their changing environments. By focusing on the bicultural experiences in the participant's lives, themes of cultural change and plotlines of continuity became evident.

Revisiting the Research Experience

The goals and objectives of this research project included identifying themes, describing cultural dress codes and exploring the nature of Aboriginal women's lived experiences regarding bicultural relations. In Figure 1, cultural change was shown as central to the research. The research puzzle identified Aboriginal culture and mainstream culture as intersecting and explored whether bicultural relationships affect dress and cultural identity.

With respect to cultural change, the researcher and the two participant's experienced personal transitions as a result of moving from urban and rural locations, attending mainstream schools and developing relationships with others from outside their cultural boundaries. The manner of the participants dress responded to the different environments signalling both willingness and resistance to accepting and assimilating cultural identity changes. Marissa identified cultural dress codes when they differed from her own and adapted certain textiles or fashions according to her own limits. For example, she eagerly adopted wearing colourful combinations reminiscent of the clothing of Egyptian and Lebanese women yet she adamantly resisted bleaching her skin to look paler, even visiting tanning salons to darken her skin before departing. Ambient's narratives described traditional dress codes especially those relating to the traditional importance of colors and the need for women to

wear skirts or dresses for specific occasions. Each participant developed unique appearance solutions for themselves that subtly maintained their affiliation with Aboriginal culture and traditions.

In the study, memories and stories about articles of clothing or choices in fashion generated a variety of information which deepened understanding about the perspectives of the speakers. Further examination revealed numerous underlying meanings. Stories of childhood memories or explanations of sentiments surrounded personal belongings suggesting certain textiles or articles of clothing are silent reminders of past. Elicited stories about dress choices led to personal observations about identity and provided insight into adaptation choices Aboriginal women make concerning cultural values and beliefs. Hidden within their explanations of dress choices were chronicles of cultural change. For example, Marissa's determination to wear high heels in rough terrain and Ambient's family's reluctance to install electricity and running water highlighted moments which instigated changes in lifestyle.

This study suggests dress as a metaphor for cultural identity can be used to study the impact of cultural change, such as resistance or adaptation leading to acculturation of another culture's values and beliefs. The study also highlighted periods in each participant's life in which certain societal mechanisms or life events led to identity instability. At the early age of fifteen, Marissa left home and by the time she was seventeen she moved from a small Northern community to the university residence. Ambient shifted from the traditional women's role to the role of a traditional man because of the loss of her husband. When she lost her father, she moved from subsistence to a career as a youth worker. Geographic relocation, attending mainstream schools and the loss of loved ones all marked transitional periods requiring adjustments to new environments.

Human ecologists study the interaction between eco-systems and humans. Their research interests pose questions about human relationships and their communities, human interactions with their surroundings, human modifications of their environments as well as human adaptive strategies and everyday life with concepts of well being. This study shows adaptive strategies used by Aboriginal women and describes their interaction with cultures outside than their culture by gathering stories about everyday life. The study opened avenues for future research into the knowledge Aboriginal women possess about their communities and their concepts of well being.

Research Narrative: Ribbons of Love

Researcher narratives in this study were composed and compiled before my exploration with Ambient and Marissa began. During my investigation of Aboriginal women's dress many themes in the participants' narratives paralleled my personal stories. The process of journaling and retelling stories about these experiences required constant reorganizing of my ideas about my bicultural life.

Until my narratives were placed chronologically, the metaphor of ribbons was not obvious. When I recalled my grandmother's ribbon drawer and my mother's ribbon rituals, the symbolic significance of ribbons surfaced. From that childhood memory, I came to understand that my youthful love of color connected me to my family and my fascination for powwow outfits was a reflection of my attraction to color, pattern and texture. Ribbons appeared throughout my narratives and the participants' narratives subtly joining the past, the present and the two cultures affecting my life.

When Kisteyim suggested that I had much more to learn about ribbons, I did not understand what he meant. When he told me that

ribbons attracted the little people, I still did not fully understand their significance. Only when Ambient referred to the little people and explained that the term included the spirit of children, did I realize that my grandmother attracted her grandchildren with ribbons. Marissa's discussion of her identity crisis and the Navajo coat reminded me of periods when I also experienced an identity crisis. Ambient remained strong in her convictions and identity as a traditional Aboriginal woman who did not question her own identity.

The theme of ribbons in my life moved from my grandmother's drawer, to my mother's hands, into my ribbon box collection, onto my ribbon shirts and powwow outfits and into my daughters' hair. The realization that my inspiration for ribbonwork was rooted in my childhood transformed my perception of my place in society because I often questioned my cultural identity and the impact immersion in another culture had on my life. From the ribbon analogy, I understood that certain aspects of my identity remained intact because my love for ribbons was rooted in my family background. Construction of the ribbonwork tobacco pouches was the culmination of a personal search that I was not aware of before I began this study. The overlapping ribbons and colors unified my past and present with the lives of the others who participated in the study. While planning and designing the ribbonwork tobacco bags, I anticipated my Aboriginal audience. The ribbons communicated an aspect of my personality to my audience and the combination of two distinct cultures became interwoven in the creation. Symbolically, I experienced a reconciliation of the two cultures that influenced my identity.

The artistic endeavor of recreating an Aboriginal design with modern ribbons and technologies signified a unity of mind, heart and soul. My mind solved the problem of expressing the emotions in my heart and the final result was a message from the soul of an artist, which then

produced a physical representation of the spirit of the research project. The act of gift giving provided me with a level of satisfaction and, in return for the ribbonwork gifts, I received the understanding that conducting this study provided insight into myself. These ribbons of love gently weave throughout my life connecting me to past generations and allow me to integrate their beauty from one culture to another. The knowledge that I am capable of adapting to changes in my social, political and economic environments without losing myself is empowering.

In recent decades, Aboriginal women have experienced varying degrees of cultural change due to shifts in societal attitudes towards women and due to changes in the Canadian Aboriginal political, social and economic environment. The participants in this study represented three decades of bicultural woman who experienced changes in their lifestyles as a result of the changing attitudes towards women and the Aboriginal culture. In the study, laying the narratives side-by-side suggests that each co-participant responded to the larger Canadian narrative which promotes equal rights for women and the integration of cultures from around the world.

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APPENDIX 2

THE RESEARCHER AND PROJECT DESCRIPTION

My name is Valerie Reay. I am graduate student studying Textiles, Clothing and Culture in the department of Human Ecology at the University of Alberta. I am interested in dress as a metaphor for cultural identity and the impact of culture change. I am seeking two Aboriginal women who live and work in "culturally distinct environments", feel connected to the traditional values and beliefs of the Aboriginal culture and are willing to share stories about their dress.

I have consulted with a respected Elder concerning the cultural relevance of the research methods, the protection of personal and community identities and the interest of this topic to Aboriginal peoples. I am contacting you to ask if you are interested in becoming a participant in my Master's research project entitled: *A Narrative Inquiry of Aboriginal Women's Dress and Identity: Change and Transition.* If you are interested in discussing your participation in the project please contact me at (780) 989-2550.

This graduate research project will be overseen and supervised by Dr. Marlene Cox-Bishop, an academic woman of Aboriginal descent who is a professor in Human Ecology - Textiles, Clothing and Culture. Her contact information is as follows:

Dr. Marlene Cox-Bishop
335 Human Ecology Building
The University of Alberta
Edmonton, Alberta T6G 2N1
Tel: (780) 492-2045
Marlene.cox-bishop@ualberta.ca

A Profile of the Prospective Participants:

Women of Aboriginal descent who:

- Identify with the traditional Aboriginal culture;
- Have post-secondary education;
- Have work experience in both mainstream and Aboriginal settings.

The Research Design

Over the course of four months, as part of my thesis research for a Master's degree, I will be gathering stories from Aboriginal women about their choices in appearance, in an attempt to capture, how personal interpretations of dress reflect culture change and identity. This research will focus on the dress of Aboriginal women who "walk in two worlds" meeting the expectations of a career while maintaining their roles in their respective Aboriginal communities.

Through informal conversations, discussions and taped interviews conducted in person, in locations suitable to both parties, the participants in this research will share with the researcher stories about dress from both their past and present lived experiences. This is a strongly collaborative effort between the researcher and the participants, which in the end produces a written story of our observations and memories. The participants will be involved in the review and editing of the written drafts and the final research text. Any future opportunities for publication of segments or future analysis of the research on the researcher's behalf, will also result in further consultation and consent between the parties involved in the study. At any time during the course of this study, the participant may withdraw.

Although the research methods are flexible and enjoyable, and no harm to you is expected, some memories and experiences elicit emotions of both joy and sadness. The research will explore feelings, personal insights and reflections. The process will also require a commitment of approximately 3-4 hours per week scheduled at convenient intervals. The interviews will includes sharing photographs, viewing of articles of clothing that may trigger meaningful memories and the process of responding to questions about these personal stories. The identities of the participants will be protected with fictitious names that the participant choices for themselves and for their communities. Consent forms will be held on file and only accessed by the researcher or the supervisor of this project.

APPENDIX 2

RESEARCH CONSENT FORM

Name of Participant:

_____

Name of Investigator:

Valerie J Reay
Masters of Arts Candidate
Department of Human Ecology
University of Alberta
Telephone: (780) 989-2550

Project Title: A Narrative Inquiry of Aboriginal Women's Dress and Identity

I understand that the information gathered in tape recorded interviews, from researcher observations and during the course of our conversations or from photographic images, and the resulting translations, and/or transcriptions and/or images will be used to complete the thesis-based research portion of Valerie Reay's graduate studies at the University of Alberta.

I agree that I am fully informed of contact information of the person supervising this research and if there are any concerns, complaints or consequences I may contact

Mr. Georgie Jarvis,
Secretary to the Human Research Ethics Board,
2-14 Ag/For Centre,
University of Alberta,
Edmonton AB T6G 2P5,
Ph. (780) 492-4931,
Fax (780) 492-0097

Please check the appropriate response:

Do you consent to being audio-taped? ☐ YES ☐ NO

Do you understand that you have been asked to be in a research study?

☐ YES ☐ NO

Have you read and received a copy of the attached information sheet?

☐ YES ☐ NO

Do you understand the benefits and risks involved in taking part in this research study? ☐ YES ☐ NO

Has confidentiality been explained to you? ☐ YES ☐ NO

Do you understand who will be able to see or hear what you said?

☐ YES ☐ NO

Do you know what the information you say will be used for?

☐ YES ☐ NO

Do you give us permission to use your data for the purposes specified?

☐ YES ☐ NO

I agree to the use of the information I have provided with the understanding that the any written version of this information is subject to my approval.

I therefore agree to the use of the information I have provided according to the conditions stated above

Signed on (date)_____

At: (community) _____, (Province)_____

by: _____ _____

Signature of the Participant Signature of the Researcher